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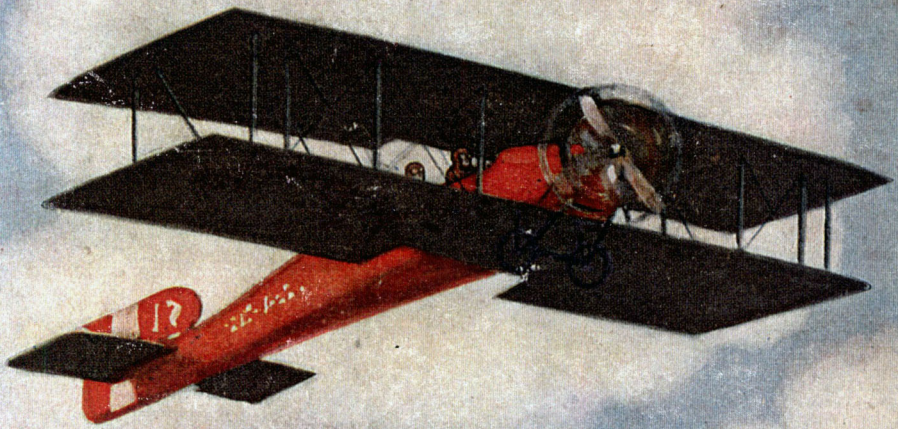

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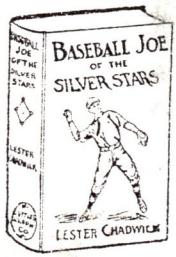

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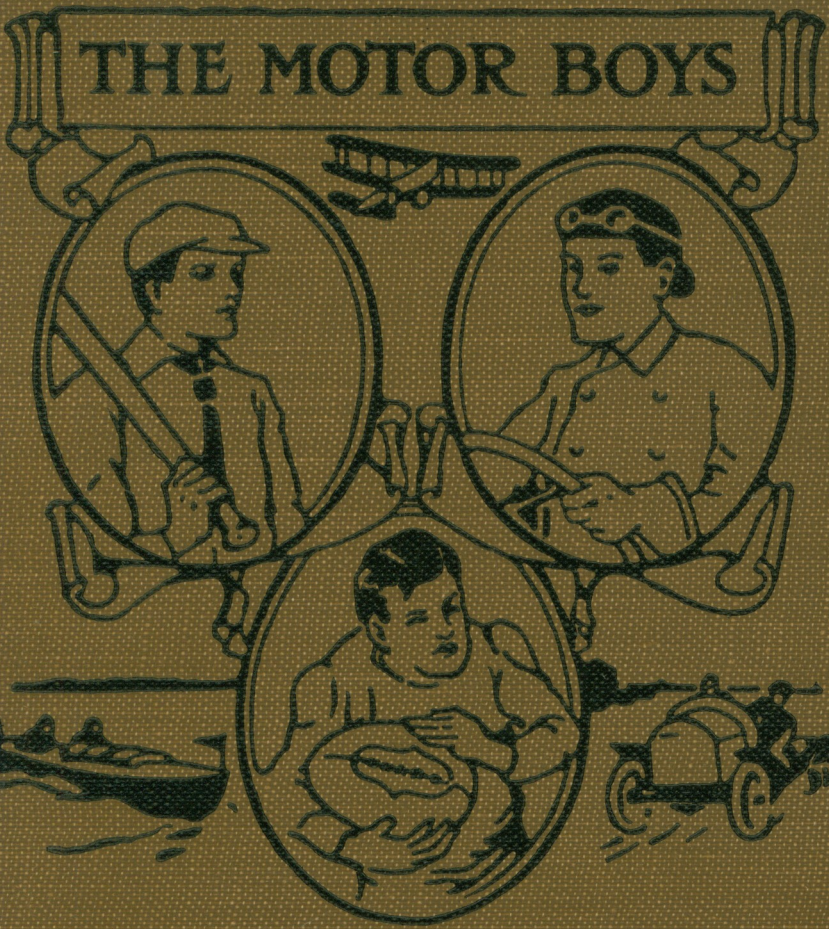
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THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE ROCKIES
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Airship Stolen	1
II.	An Unconscious Watchman	11
III.	On a Mysterious Trail	17
IV.	A Farmer's Clew	28
V.	The Telegram	41
VI.	The Airship Recovered	51
VII.	A Trace of Mr. Bell	63
VIII.	Home in the Airship	71
IX.	Professor Snodgrass on Hand	79
X.	Off for the West	88
XI.	A Town in Trouble	95
XII.	New Use for an Airship	103
XIII.	Running the Cable	110
XIV.	The Professor Is Missing	117
XV.	At the Mining Camp	123
XVI.	The Miner's Story	131
XVII.	Noddy Nixon Arrives	139
XVIII.	Off for Lost Valley	146
XIX.	Wrecked on the Desert	156

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	A Lion in Possession	163
XXI.	Mr. Bell Is Found	172
XXII.	Over Lost Valley	183
XXIII.	The Flickering Lights	195
XXIV.	Bushes of Death	201
XXV.	The Professor's Cousin	208
XXVI.	Planning the Escape	216
XXVII.	In Disguise	222
XXVIII.	Mysterious Rites	227
XXIX.	The Fight	234
XXX.	Noddy Nixon Defeated—Conclusion	240

THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE ROCKIES

CHAPTER I

THE AIRSHIP STOLEN

"WELL, we ought to settle this question about our vacations, one way or another, fellows," remarked a tall, good-looking lad, with something of an air of worriment, as he glanced at his two comrades who were stretched out in the shade of a big maple tree one hot afternoon. He plucked some blades of grass from the well-kept lawn, that extended back to a large, white house, with big pillars, put the spears of green into his mouth, and chewed them reflectively. Then he added: "Why can't you and Chunky agree, Ned? What's the use of disputing? It's too hot."

"Of course it is," answered the smaller of the two lads thus addressed.

"Hot nothing!" puffed the stout youth, whom the first speaker had called "Chunky" in tribute to his fleshiness. "It's only hot because you imagine it, Ned Slade."

"Bob says that because he wants to go South," retorted Ned. "Eh, Jerry?"

"Now don't you agree with him, Jerry Hopkins!" cried Bob Baker. "Be on my side for once," and he looked an appeal at his tall chum. "Ned wants to go to Canada."

"I'd like to go to the North Pole to-day," responded Ned, turning over, as if to find a cooler place in the grass. "But, speaking seriously, I think I've got as much right to insist that the next trip we take in our airship shall be to some new locality, as Bob has to suggest that we go South."

"Of course you've got a right to insist," agreed Bob, puffing over his exertion of turning on one side. "Of course you have, Ned. Who started this argument, anyhow?" and he spoke rather sharply.

"Guess I've got as much right to start an argument as you have, Bob," was Ned's retort, and there was an unpleasant tone in his voice, at which Jerry looked troubled.

"Come, fellows," spoke the tall lad, soothing-

ly. "It's too warm to bicker. Get down to business. We'll take a vote on it. Where shall we spend this vacation in our airship?"

"I say South!" exclaimed Bob quickly.

"He's thinking of the Florida everglades, where the Seabury girls had their houseboat, or else he wants to try to locate another buried city in Mexico," broke in Ned.

"I do; eh? Well, what attracts you to Canada?" demanded the stout lad.

"Maybe he's heard that the Seabury girls are going there," suggested Jerry, with a smile.

"No," answered Ned. "I only thought it would be cooler. I'm willing to leave it to you, Jerry."

"So am I," agreed Bob, more amiably, and the little cloud that seemed to threaten to come over the friendship of the chums, had almost vanished.

"I was going to suggest a Western trip," proposed Jerry quickly, wishing to strike while the iron was hot, "but as we have been there before, perhaps Ned will object."

"It depends on what part of the West you'd aim for," came from Ned. "Go ahead, Jerry, and tell us some more."

"Sure," agreed the tall lad, pleasantly. He glanced quizzically at his two chums. Bob was idly

chewing a leaf, and Ned was gazing up into the blue sky through the leaves of the maple tree.

The three chums, whose devotion to vehicles of the gasolene type, from motor cycles to airships, had gained for them the title of "The Motor Boys," lived in the town of Cresville, not far from Boston. Bob Baker's father was Andrew Baker, a rich banker; Ned was a son of Aaron Slade, who was the proprietor of a large department store, and Jerry Hopkins was the only child of Mrs. Julia Hopkins, a wealthy widow.

The boys had had many adventures together, and the beginning of them was told of in the first book of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys." Their activities started in a bicycle race, but they soon exchanged their wheels for motor cycles, and a short time after that they won a touring car, offered as a prize. In that they made a long trip overland, and, later, went to Mexico, to which trip Ned referred when he mentioned the buried city, for the boys actually did discover one, for which a friend of theirs, Professor Uriah Snodgrass, a noted scientist, was in search.

They returned home from Mexico across the western plains of the United States, and then, using some money they had made from a gold

mine they had located, they bought a speedy motor boat.

The fifth volume of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys Afloat," took up their adventures in connection with the speedy craft *Dartaway*. They had some stirring times around home, and then took quite a long trip along the Atlantic coast. From there they journeyed to the mysterious Florida everglades, to which Ned had also referred. But the happenings there, strange and weird as they were, seemed, to the boys at least, to be more than equalled in a trip they made on the Pacific, though this voyage was in a motor boat they hired, as their own was smashed in a freight wreck.

The growing interest in aeronautics soon led the motor boys to investigate the possibility of navigating through the air, and, shortly after their return from their trip on the Pacific, they began to build an airship. In this they were assisted by a Mr. Rupert Glassford, and in the ninth book of this series, called "The Motor Boys in the Clouds," there was related the particulars of a trip they took for fame and fortune.

Their airship, a combination of dirigible balloon and aeroplane, was called the *Comet*, and was one of the most completely fitted-up air craft

devised in recent years. There was ample accommodation for a long trip, and the travelers could keep afloat in it a long time, provided no accident occurred. In it, as related in the ninth book, they won a substantial prize in competition with a number of balloons and aeroplanes.

It was about this airship that Bob, Ned and Jerry were talking the pleasant summer afternoon, on which I have, once more, brought them to the attention of my readers. As they sat there on the grass, their minds went back to the wonderful air trip they had made and they thought of the efforts of Professor Snodgrass to capture strange insects and bugs, for that was the one hobby of the scientist. They also recalled the dastardly attempt made by Noddy Nixon, a town bully, to injure them, by firing at their craft. Noddy had made an attempt to build a sort of airship, but had failed.

Now the motor boys were on the point of planning a second flight in their craft, only, as has been indicated, they could not seem to agree on where to go. The long summer vacation had arrived, bringing a cessation of studies, and in the blood of the three chums there was a desire to be doing something.

For several seconds after Jerry Hopkins had

announced his willingness to tell his chums of his plan, he remained silent; so long, in fact, that Bob asked:

"Well, what about it, Jerry? Are you, too, thinking of the Seabury girls?"

"Not exactly," was the answer, accompanied by a short laugh. "I was just considering the best method of presenting the matter to you fellows, so you wouldn't get on your ears again; that's all."

"Punch him, Bob!" cried Ned suddenly. "You're nearer than I am. The nerve of him! Insulting us like that!"

Bob playfully raised his fleshy fist with the intention of thumping Jerry in the side, but the other, with a quick motion, snapped a pebble from his thumb, and the little stone struck Bob on the end of the nose, causing him to wince.

"Ouch! Quit that!" the stout lad cried.

"That was just my way of calling the meeting to order," declared Jerry. "I'm ready to proceed, now. My plan would be to make as long a trip as possible. It would be something of a record to fly from here to, say, Kansas or Colorado."

"Why not to Arizona while you're about it," put in Bob, still rubbing his nose in a reflective

manner. "Then we could see if Jim Nestor is giving us our share of the gold from our mine, though, of course, I only said that last for a joke," he added hastily.

"You couldn't make Arizona on one supply of gasolene," objected Ned.

"Who said we could?" fired back Bob. The spirit of contention was not yet stilled, so Jerry hastened to add:

"Of course, it wouldn't be possible to make anything like as long a trip as that without coming down, but I calculated on that. We won't try for speed, only for distance. The reason I proposed the West is that this season of the year is best for going out there: the prevailing winds are more favorable, and I think we would enjoy it immensely. Of course it is nice down South, and, as for Canada, I have heard that it is fine there in the summer, but if you left it for me to decide, I'd say let's take the *Comet* and go West."

"All right," agreed Bob, whose usual good spirits had returned. "I'm willing. West it shall be," and he looked inquiringly at Ned, who was not the one to hold out against his two chums.

"I'm willing," he announced. "We'll get the *Comet* ready for a long Western trip—across the

Rocky Mountains if necessary. We'll have a fine——"

Ned's remarks were suddenly interrupted by the arrival of a small lad who rushed across the lawn toward where the three chums were sitting under the tree. The newcomer was much excited. His hat had fallen off, one cuff was all awry, and his hair was tousled, while his cheeks were flushed.

"I—say!" he cried, brokenly, not pausing in his rush. "I—just—came past—the shed—where you—keep your airship. It's terrible—door broken open—lock smashed—things scattered all about—watchman not there—airship gone!" The little lad had to pause for breath.

"The airship gone!" exclaimed Jerry, leaping to his feet, an example followed by Ned and Bob. "What do you mean, Andy Rush? Is this a joke?"

"No joke at all—airship's gone—I saw the vacant shed," and Andy Rush sank down on the grass, completely exhausted by his run, and his rapid talk, which latter was characteristic of him, by nature as well as by name.

"Did you see it go?" cried Bob.

"No, I didn't see it go—but it was gone when I came past," answered the excitable little chap.

"Who took it?" demanded Bob, clenching his fists, as if he wanted to attack some one.

"Don't know!" gasped Andy. "But—it's gone. First—I thought—you fellows—had it out, but when—I came up here—and saw you sitting down —I knew it—wasn't you. But it's gone!"

"Come on, fellows!" commanded Jerry quickly. "Let's see what's up."

Followed by Andy they hurried off toward the shed where the Comet was kept. This structure was some distance away from Jerry's house. It had been specially built to house the airship, and was located in the midst of a large field, owned by Mrs. Hopkins, which field gave ample room for maneuvring the craft. It was some distance from a road, and in an unfrequented locality.

It did not take long to arrive at the place. Before they reached the shed they could see that the big doors were opened. So far Andy's tale had been confirmed. A few minutes later the motor boys were staring into the empty shed. The big air craft was gone!

"It's been stolen, boys!" exclaimed Jerry, as he stepped into the shed. "Our airship has been stolen!"

"And I'll wager Noddy Nixon had a hand in it!" added Bob. "Let's get right after him!"

CHAPTER II

AN UNCONSCIOUS WATCHMAN

AFTER the first moment of hesitation, the boys, including Andy Rush, stepped within the big shed. It was as if they hoped to see the *Comet* concealed somewhere in the place, but the expanse of the airship planes, and the immense, bulging, gas bag did not greet their eyes.

"How long ago did you come past here, Andy?" asked Jerry, recovering some of his usual calmness.

"Not ten minutes ago," replied the little chap. "I was on my way to town, and I thought I'd take this short cut. As soon as I came within sight of the shed, I saw the open doors."

"And what did you do?" asked Bob.

"Looked in, to see if you were going off on a trip," replied Andy. "I thought maybe you'd give me a ride. Then, when I saw the airship gone, and noticed that the doors were broken open, I knew something must have happened. I hurried

off to find you—saw you sitting on the grass as if nothing had happened—great excitement—airship stolen—robbers in it—Noddy Nixon, maybe—airship wrecked—maybe—whoop!" and Andy ended up with a gasp, so rapid had been his utterance.

"Now just calm yourself," begged Jerry. "Tell us all you can, Andy."

"That's all I know," replied the small, excitable chap.

"The bars on the doors are broken," called Bob, as he made an examination. "How do you s'pose that happened?"

"That's so," admitted Jerry, who had overlooked this part of Andy's account. "And I wonder where Sud Snuffles is? He ought to be around. He's paid enough to watch this place."

"That's right; where is Sud?" inquired Ned. "Maybe he went off in the airship with the thieves."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Jerry. "Let's look around."

The boys proceeded to make an examination of the interior of the shed. As Andy had related, it was in some confusion. Tools of various kinds were scattered about, and several boxes and chests had been broken open, and the

contents, consisting of supplies for the craft, some canned food stuffs and spare parts, had been taken out. A big hammer near the front doors showed how the latter had been broken open.

"Those doors were smashed from inside!" cried Ned, after a more careful scrutiny.

"What makes you think so?" asked Jerry.

"Because the hammer's thrown down inside, and the way the bolts are bent shows that the force was from within."

"From within, eh?" murmured Jerry. "That's interesting."

"What does it indicate?" inquired Bob, who was not always so quick to see a point as were his two chums.

"Why it shows that the robbers, whoever they were, got into this shed from some other entrance than the big doors," went on Jerry.

"Of course!" cried Ned. "The small door at the back! Why didn't we think of it before? That's the way Sud Snuffles goes in and out nights. I remember he said it was too much trouble to open the big double doors, and Sud was never very fond of work."

"Come on; we must look for Sud, and see if the side door has been forced," decided Jerry.

As they hurried through the big shed, to a small portal in the rear, Andy Rush remarked:

"I wonder how the thieves dare take the airship in broad daylight? Everyone around here knows it belongs to you fellows, and if Noddy Nixon or anyone else was seen in it, the police would be notified. It was a risky thing to do!"

"Maybe it wasn't done in daylight," suggested Jerry. "I was down here last evening, before dusk, and everything was all right, and Sud was on guard. He always stays all night. It may be that the ship was stolen last night, and Andy was the first one to notice it this morning."

"I guess you're right," agreed Ned. "But now to find Sud, and see what explanation he has to make. If he has deserted his place, and gone off, we'll discharge him."

By this time the lads were at the small door. Near it was a chair and a cot, on which the watchman was in the habit of sitting or lying during the night. Sud Snuffles had been hired by the motor boys shortly after their return from their first long trip, for as the airship was in a shed, some distance away from the nearest house, they feared some mischievous persons might try to damage it. But, up to the present, there had been no trouble. Sud was an odd character, somewhat

shiftless, and not much given to holding a steady position. He was very fond of traveling, and the night job just suited him, because he could roam about in the daytime, when there was no necessity for being on guard. He seemed to have a faculty of getting into all sorts of trouble, and slipping out again with ease.

"I don't see anything of Sud," remarked Jerry, peering about.

"Then he's gone with the thieves!" decided Andy. "He's in a conspiracy with them! Helped steal the airship—gone off on a trip—he's fond of traveling—he'd go ten thousand miles—never come back—whoop!"

"Andy, *will* you be quiet," begged Jerry. "This may be a serious matter. Look around and see if you can find any traces of Sud, boys."

"He seems to have slept in the cot," observed Bob. "The clothes are all mussed up."

They began a hasty search of the rear of the shop, Andy joining in. But though they looked in several closets where tools or supplies were kept, and peered into all sorts of odd nooks and corners, there was no sign of the watchman.

"I'm afraid he has gone off," began Jerry, but, the next moment, he and the others were startled by hearing a groan.

"What's that?" cried Bob.

"Somebody's killed!" gasped Andy, his face turning pale.

"Nonsense!" cried Jerry.

"It sounded from under the cot," observed Ned.

His words were a signal for all to rush to the little bed. Jerry lifted up the clothes that draped over the front edge, concealing a view underneath. As the lad raised the coverlets, there was disclosed a pitiful sight.

Old Sud Snuffles, tied with numerous ropes, his head enveloped in a bag, lay under the cot. He was as helpless as a baby, and, as the boys looked at him in wonder and alarm, a stifled groan came from the bag. At the same time Jerry sniffed the air suspiciously.

"Boys!" he cried, "Sud has been drugged—chloroformed! We must bring him to consciousness, and then, maybe, he can tell us about the theft of our airship. There's been some queer goings-on here!"

CHAPTER III

ON A MYSTERIOUS TRAIL

IT WAS the work of only a few seconds for the active lads to get poor Sud from under the cot, and cut the ropes that bound him. Then the bag was taken from his head, and it was discovered that he was gagged. The smell of chloroform was more strong and Jerry, applying to his nose the rag that had served to stifle the voice of the watchman, detected on it the odor of the drug.

"This is desperate business," remarked Ned soberly.

"Indeed it is," asserted Jerry. "If Noddy Nixon has had a hand in this I'll prosecute him for it. He's going too far. This is the worst of his many tricks."

"Do you think Sud will die?" inquired Andy, hovering about anxiously, moving here and there, like a restless bird. "Is he dead now? I can't hear him breathe."

"Oh, he'll be all right as soon as we get him

into the fresh air," declared Jerry. "Bob, bring me the aromatic ammonia. I'll give him a few drops, and then we'll carry him outside."

The boys, from long experience in traveling and camping, knew something about simple remedies, and soon a restorative was being forced through Sud's lips. Then he was carried outside the shed, and his collar loosened. In a few minutes he opened his eyes, and stared wonderingly about him.

"Don't—don't hit me again!" he implored. "I ain't never done nothin' to you, Mr. Nixon—but I can't let you take the airship without——" then the unfortunate man stopped, as he saw friendly faces about him.

"Was I—did I dream it?" he asked, passing his hand over his head. "Is the airship all right? Was Noddy Nixon here? Did he hit me?" and he felt of the back of his head.

"The airship is gone," replied Jerry. "What happened, Sud? Were you attacked? Was Noddy Nixon here in the night?"

"He was, or else I dreamed it," declared the watchman. "He struck me, too, and then I don't remember what happened, except I smelled something funny. Then it got dark, and I heard noises —but you say the airship's gone?"

"Completely," broke in Bob.

"Then we must get right after Noddy Nixon, and the old man, and Jack Pender, who were with him!" declared Sud excitedly, trying to rise, but falling weakly back.

"Easy now, take it easy," advised Jerry soothingly. "We'll get after him, all right. But you must first tell us what happened. Do you feel strong enough?"

"Oh, yes, I'm all right now," replied the watchman. "I'm getting better every minute. I'll tell you as much as I know."

"Take a little of this medicine and you'll feel stronger," advised Jerry, holding a glass to the man's lips. When Sud had partaken of it, he resumed:

"It must have been about eleven o'clock last night, when I was just getting ready to turn in, that I heard some persons coming to the shed. By the way they walked I knew there was more than one, and I was wondering if you boys had decided to make a night trip, without speaking to me about it. Well, I went to the door, when there came a knock on it—the small back door, you know," he said, and the boys nodded comprehendingly. "You can imagine my surprise when I saw Noddy Nixon, and two persons with him.

Noddy walked right in, as if he owned the place, and told the others to come in, too."

"Who were they?" interrupted Jerry.

"One was Jack Pender," replied the watchman, and Jerry nodded his head. Well he knew Pender, an unscrupulous crony of Noddy's, who had, more than once, made trouble for the motor boys.

"And who was the other?" Ned wanted to know.

"He was a stranger," said Sud. "An old man, with a long white beard, and a peculiar scar on his jaw."

"What sort of a mark?" inquired Bob.

"It was shaped like the letter L as near as I could make out."

"What's that?" cried Jerry. "Like the letter L, you say? And an old man, with a white beard? Yet it's hardly possible that it can be he——"

"Who?" inquired Bob excitedly.

"The old hermit of Lost Lake," answered Jerry musingly. "You know, fellows, he had just such a scar; but what would he be doing here, especially in company with Noddy Nixon? No, it can't be!"

"I don't know what sort of a man you're speaking of," went on Sud, "but this man seemed to know you. He spoke of Bob and Ned, and said

he now owed so much to you that he could never repay it. He added that if he could use the airship to rescue the people from the deep valley he would be more than ever in your debt."

"Rescue people from the valley? Be in our debt? And he spoke as if he knew us?" fired Jerry at the watchman. "Then it must have been the old hermit, Jackson Bell, whom we rescued—and whose son, Bobby, we saved from the gang of Mexicans. But I can't understand it—it seems incredible—how came he here—how did he come to mention all this?" and Jerry looked with a puzzled air at Sud Snuffles, who was rapidly recovering.

"He didn't mention it all at once," said the watchman. "The old hermit, if that's what you call him, let out by degrees what I have told you. So his name was Jackson Bell, eh? Well, Noddy didn't call him anything."

"Probably he did not want you to remember the name," suggested Bob. "But I'm sure it's the same man." The description of the rescue of the hermit will be found in the book "The Motor Boys Across the Plains; or the Hermit of Lost Lake."

"What else did you hear, and what happened?" inquired Ned.

"Well, I was naturally surprised to see Noddy and the two persons with him," resumed the watchman, "and more so when Noddy gave me a note, and said Jerry Hopkins had written it, and that it was permission for him to take out the airship."

"A note from me?" cried Jerry. "Let's see it!"

Sud Snuffles fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a crumpled paper, which he extended to Jerry, who eagerly scanned it.

"A rank forgery," he pronounced it, "yet good enough to fool you, Sud, especially at night."

"What does the note say?" asked Andy.

"It reads: 'Permission is hereby given Noddy Nixon and his friends to take out the *Comet,*' and it's signed with my name," replied Jerry. "But go on, Sud. What happened next?"

"Well, when I saw the note I thought everything was all right, though it looked queer. Still it wasn't up to me to say anything. Then Noddy went around as if he owned the place, and he began explaining to the old man with the white beard how the airship worked. He said that in it he could rescue the friends of the old man without any trouble."

"I wonder what that rescue means?" mused Jerry. "Can some of Mr. Bell's friends be held

prisoners; and has he come to us for help, only to be roped in by Noddy Nixon?"

"It looks that way," declared Bob.

"There's some mystery here," asserted Ned, "and it's up to us to solve it."

"And we'll do it!" exclaimed Jerry. "Go on, Sud, tell us all you can. This is getting deeper and deeper."

"There was some talk between Jerry and the old hermit, as you call him," resumed the watchman. "The hermit said he would pay well for the use of the airship, and Noddy seemed to know all about running it."

"Yes, though he hasn't had much experience, he can run an airship all right," admitted Ned. "He's watched us."

"Well," went on Sud Snuffles, "they talked of going out West, and as I knew you boys had planned to go on your vacation in the *Comet* I wondered at your giving permission for that. It was this talk that made me suspicious, and I hung around where Noddy was talking to Mr. Bell, as you say his name was. That seemed to make Noddy mad, and he told me to go to bed. I wouldn't do it, and, when the elderly man was away up in the front part of the airship cabin—for he inspected every part of it—Noddy and

Jack Pender came close to me. Before I knew what was happening they both sprang at me, and knocked me down. I tried to yell and I fought as well as I could, but they were too much for me. The last I remember is feeling them tie something over my mouth, then I smelled something queer, and I seemed to go to sleep. The next thing I knew after hearing confused sounds, as if something was being smashed, was when you awakened me."

"The smashing you heard was them battering away at the big bolts on the front door," was Bob's opinion, and his chums nodded. The portal fastened with bars and bolts instead of a lock and key.

"Well, I, for one, can't understand all of it," said Andy. "Whoop! But things must have happened, though."

"Several things very evidently happened," remarked Jerry dryly, "and rather mysterious happenings they were, too," and then the leader of the Motor Boys explained his view of the matter. It was his opinion that Mr. Jackson Bell, at one time a hermit, but whom the boys had not seen in some time, had come East with a view of providing for the rescue of some persons (his friends, probably) from some strange valley. Unexpect-

edly he had met with Noddy Nixon, so Jerry believed, and Noddy had seized the opportunity to make some money out of Mr. Bell, deceiving him as to the ownership of the airship.

Jerry explained how he believed that Noddy had forged the note he took to Sud Snuffles, accompanied by Jack Pender, and the former hermit.

"Everything went well, I think," went on Jerry, "until after Noddy had handed over the forged note, and prepared to take away our airship. Then he became fearful that it would be evidence against him, and he and Jack attacked Sud, to take the note away. They rendered the watchman unconscious, smashed open the big doors, and floated out in the *Comet,* for Noddy has seen us operate it often enough to understand the mechanism. Now the question is, to decide where they have gone. Very likely Noddy set off in quest of the mysterious valley, that Mr. Bell knows about."

"Anyhow, I'm glad I managed to keep the forged note," observed Sud Snuffles.

"Yes, it will be a sort of clew," remarked Bob.

"It's a wonder Mr. Bell didn't get suspicious and leave when Noddy and Jack were struggling with Sud," suggested Ned.

"He probably didn't hear the fight," was Jerry's opinion. "Mr. Bell (if it really was he) was,

very likely, in the cabin of our airship, and the fight, as Sud says, took place at the rear of the shed. Besides, probably Mr. Bell was thinking so deeply over the prospective rescue of his friends from danger, that he paid little attention to anything else.

"What danger do you suppose his friends are in, Jerry?" asked Bob.

"Haven't the least idea. It must be something desperate, though, to induce him to seek an airship with which to rescue them. It's a mystery—a mystery of the air, and we've got to solve it."

"Suppose we can't?" asked Ned. "Maybe we'll never see the *Comet* again. Noddy Nixon may smash it all to pieces."

"Don't suggest such a thing!" begged Jerry earnestly. "We'll get right after Noddy, and we'll try to get at the bottom of the mystery. If Mr. Bell, or his friends, are in trouble we will help them, and, if necessary, in the *Comet,* for we'll get it away from Noddy and Jack. Then we'll see what will happen."

"But how are we going to chase after Noddy?" asked Bob. "We haven't anything that can go as fast as the *Comet.*"

"Not quite as swiftly, but nearly," answered Jerry with a smile. "Our automobile! We'll get

that out, and get right on the trail of this mystery! Come on, fellows! We've lost enough time as it is! Now for the chase!" and Jerry started back toward his house, followed by his chums and Sud Snuffles.

CHAPTER IV

A FARMER'S CLEW

THE boys, with Sud, were soon at Jerry's house. Mrs. Hopkins, looking from the window of her sitting room, saw their excited manners, and, fearing that something had happened, hurried down stairs.

"What's the matter, Jerry?" she cried. "Is anyone hurt?"

"Only me, Mrs. Hopkins," replied Sud, who was not a little proud to be thus the centre of attraction. "And I'm not hurt so very much," he added. "It's my feelings more than anything. The idea of me letting Noddy Nixon and Jack Pender tie me up the way they did."

"You couldn't help it," commented Bob, while Jerry soon related to his mother what had occurred, and told of their plan to set off in search of the missing airship.

"Now, please be careful, boys," the widow begged. "That Noddy Nixon is getting to be a

desperate character. He may do you some injury."

"I'd like to see him!" cried Ned. "If we get within sight of him and Jack they'll jump overboard out of the *Comet* without waiting for us. But I think, Jerry, that we ought to have him and Jack arrested for stealing our airship. Let's swear out a warrant for those two chaps, and then we can ask the aid of the police in locating them."

"That's what I'd do," put in Sud, who was rubbing his head, where there was a lump, caused by the tussle with the two bullies. "Have 'em arrested, and I'll make a charge of something or other against 'em." Bob also thought it would be a good plan to take formal action.

"Well, we'll see what your fathers say," remarked Jerry, who had none of his own to consult. "We'll go over and see Mr. Slade and Mr. Baker," he added, turning to his mother, "and be guided by them. In the meanwhile, Sud, get out the automobile, will you, and see that it's in shape for a long trip."

"Oh, are you going away again, Jerry?" asked Mrs. Hopkins, in some distress. "I was in hopes that you would remain at home a few weeks this vacation."

"We were just planning our vacation in the airship, when Andy Rush brought word that it had been stolen," replied Ned. "I guess now we'll have to stay home, or else go on a trip in the auto."

"That's right, I discovered that the *Comet* was gone!" exclaimed the excitable Andy. "Doors busted open—Sud unconscious—everything upside down—great excitement—tell the police—get a gun and shoot at Noddy—whoop!" and the little chap had to stand on his tiptoes to get out the last few words.

"There, there now, Andy," spoke Jerry, soothingly. "Come on, fellows, we'll take some advice on this. Get at the auto, Sud, that is, if you feel able."

"Oh, I'm all right now," answered the watchman, as he started toward the garage, which had recently been built at the side of Jerry's house.

In turn Mr. Slade and Mr. Baker were informed of the theft of the airship, and asked as to the necessity of swearing out a warrant against Noddy and Jack. Both gentlemen were opposed to it, and Mr. Baker said:

"If you do get the warrants, and arrest those lads, you will also be obliged to arrest Mr. Bell,

the hermit, as you call him. He was with the lads when they took the airship, you think, and, in the eyes of the law, is just as guilty. You don't want to have him taken into custody, do you?"

"No, indeed," replied Jerry. "Mr. Bell is a good friend of ours, and, though we can't just understand what he is doing with Noddy and Jack, nor about the mysterious rescue of his friends, we know he has been deceived by those two chaps. No, we'd better not get any warrants. We'll hunt for 'em on our own account, and settle with 'em when we find 'em. Come on, boys, back to my house, and then for an auto trip!"

"I wish I could come," said Andy wistfully. Jerry looked at Bob and Ned. Both nodded in a friendly manner.

"All right, Andy, come along," answered the widow's son. "You did us a great service in letting us know, so soon, that the airship was stolen, and you're entitled to some reward. Only there is one favor I'm going to ask of you."

"What's that?" inquired Andy quickly.

"When we sight Noddy in the airship, just keep cool," went on the tall lad. "If you get excited and talk as much hot air as you usually

do, you may explode the gas in the balloon, and then it will be worse than having the *Comet* stolen."

"I'll keep quiet," promised Andy very earnestly. "I'll not say a word."

The four lads were soon back at Jerry's house, and found Sud busy tinkering with the auto, for he knew something about cars. The gasolene tank was full, and he was putting water in the radiator.

The car was now ready to start, and the boys climbed in. Ned and Bob had notified their folks that they might be gone all day, and probably part of the night, and Andy Rush had, by telephoning home, secured permission to accompany them.

Jerry went into the house to bid his mother good-bye, and, as he came out, Bob stood up in the tonneau of the car, where he had taken his place with Andy.

"I say, Jerry," began the stout lad, eagerly, "what about grub? It will soon be dinner time, and——"

"Oh, good land! I might have known that was coming!" and Ned fairly groaned. "There you go again, Chunky!"

"Well, I guess it will soon be dinner time, won't it?" and the lad, who had gained a reputation in the way of always being hungry, appealed to Jerry.

"It will, if time continues to fly as it has this morning, Bob," was the answer.

"Of course, and we'll have to eat. Hadn't you better take along a lunch? Or, if your cook is too busy to put up one, drive around to our place, and I'll get a few sandwiches."

"They keep 'em in barrels at Bob's house," explained Ned to Mrs. Hopkins, who was a smiling observer of the scene. "All Bob has to do is to push a button for whatever kind of sandwich he wants between meals. They know his failing. I dare say the cook is at this moment buttering bread, and cutting meat in anticipation of hearing Chunky's despairing cry of 'I'm hungry,' at almost any minute."

"Oh, you dry up!" commanded Bob, indignantly. "You'd think I was the only one in this crowd who ever ate anything."

"Well, boys, if you think you'll not be home before lunch," began Mrs. Hopkins, "perhaps you had better——"

"No, mother, thank you," interrupted Jerry,

anticipating what she was going to say. "We'll stop and buy our dinner on the way. We have delayed too long as it is."

"Oh, well, as long as we're going to eat sometime, that's all I want," commented Bob, with a sigh of relief, as he took his seat again. Jerry climbed up, and assumed charge of the steering wheel, while Ned cranked up, and with a series of "chugs-chugs" the auto started off, the boys waving a farewell to Mrs. Hopkins.

"It seems like old times to be traveling this way, doesn't it?" asked Ned, of Jerry, as they went swinging along the country road. "Maybe we'll have to take our vacation in this, after all."

"It wouldn't be so bad," was his chum's opinion, as he suddenly steered to one side, to avoid running over an angry dog, who seemed to object to the progress of the car.

"That's so, we were talking about where we would spend our vacation, when Andy came along with his news," put in Bob, from the tonneau.

"Now, don't start that dispute again," begged Jerry. "We are going to have a rather strenuous time, if I'm any judge, before we get through with this search."

"Oh, I wasn't going to start any dispute," remarked Bob quickly. "I was going to say that I'd

leave it all to you, where we'll go this summer. I don't care, as long as we get the *Comet* back."

"Me either," added Ned. "I'll leave it to Jerry."

"Then what do you say that we fulfill the agreement, which Noddy seems falsely to have made with our hermit?" asked the tall lad.

"You mean to go to the rescue of his friends?" inquired Ned, with a queer look at his chum's face.

"That's what I mean," went on Jerry, quietly. "Wherever or whoever they are, let's go to their rescue in the *Comet*. They must be in some peculiar situation or an airship would never be needed to save them. We'll take Noddy's place, and help our old friend, Jackson Bell."

Jerry then went into details about his plan of pursuit. He proposed that they proceed in their auto, along the main, or state road, in a westerly direction, for Jerry believed that would be Noddy's destination. It was Jerry's belief that Noddy would not dare to run the airship at full speed, which would make it possible to overtake him in the auto.

"We'll probably be gone on our quest several days," went on the leader of the lads, and when Andy Rush heard this he expressed a fear that his parents would not like him to be away over

night. It was then agreed that, in case Noddy was not overtaken that day, to send Andy back home by train.

A little later the search was under way, and, as the speedy machine swayed along over the hard road, the boys scanned the sky for any speck, large or small, which might proclaim the presence of the *Comet*. From time to time they stopped, to make inquiries from other autoists or persons driving, as to whether or not an airship had been sighted that morning.

Some of their questions were met with puzzled looks, as if the persons thought they were being made the butt of a joke. Others were interested enough, and made all sorts of inquiries, as to why the boys were searching, but they had seen nothing of the craft of the air.

The lads made a stop for dinner at a country hotel, and when Bob heard that there was to be chicken pot-pie his broad face was wreathed in smiles.

"I'm glad we didn't bring any lunch along," he remarked, "because we couldn't have taken anything more than sandwiches. But chicken pot-pie —Ah, um!" and he sniffed the air suggestively.

They were under way again that afternoon, but as they proceeded mile after mile, and saw no

signs of the airship, and heard nothing from the many inquiries they made, they all began to get a bit discouraged. It was about four o'clock, when Andy Rush, who had stared up into the sky so steadily that his neck was getting stiff, uttered an exclamation:

"There he is!" cried the little chap. "Stop the auto—get a gun—shoot him—make him stop—we've got him!" and he stood up and pointed at a black speck in the sky. Clearly it was not a bird, for it was moving too slowly, and it looked as if it might be some sort of an airship. Jerry jammed on the brakes, after shutting off the power, and took up a pair of powerful field glasses. These he trained on the speck, while his companions waited anxiously:

"It's only a box kite," said Jerry at last. "It's pretty high up, though. Too bad, Andy."

They went on again, and as the afternoon passed they began to give up hope, and talked of where they would spend the night, for they were determined not to go back home without some news of their airship. They had come prepared for a night's stay at a hotel, and, not many miles from where they now were, was a railroad station, where Andy could get a train home.

As they were chug-chugging along a quiet road,

Jerry saw, just ahead of him, a farmer driving toward them a spirited team of horses.

"Guess I'll slow up a bit when passing them," the tall lad remarked to his chums. "I don't want a runaway."

The team seemed so skittish as they approached that, for fear of frightening them, Jerry shut off all power, and the auto came to a stop.

"I'm much obliged to you," called the farmer, as he held in the animals when passing the car. "It ain't often that automobile fellers is as considerate as you be. I appreciate it. Besides, my team hasn't gotten over a fright they had early this morning."

"How was that?" asked Ned, while the farmer pulled up, the two fine horses evincing less fear of the auto, now that it was quiet. "Did a car scare them this morning?"

"Well, not exactly an automobile," was the answer, "that is, unless autos run overhead in the air."

Jerry caught at that remark at once:

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"Why just this," was the unexpected answer. "When I was going to market, about three o'clock this morning, my horses nearly ran away when something about as big as ten automobiles scooted

CHAPTER V

THE TELEGRAM

BUT if the motor boys thought they would soon catch up to those who had stolen the *Comet* they were doomed to disappointment. For the rest of the day they drove the auto at top speed, but there was no sign of the missing airship, nor could they get any news of it.

"We might as well put up for the night," was Jerry's opinion, as it began to get dark. "We may pass it in the night, if we don't. Andy, we'll take you to the station, and send you home. I'll telegraph your folks that you are coming, so they won't be worried."

"I wish I could come with you," spoke the little chap.

But they knew it would be best for him to return, and after promising him a ride in the *Comet,* when they should have recovered it, they bade farewell to the excitable lad at the station. They put up at a hotel in the town of Rodmead, which

was about a hundred miles from Cresville, the auto having made good time on her searching trip. After supper the lads talked over their plans.

"It's certain that we're going in the right direction," remarked Jerry, "but when we'll catch up to Noddy is another matter. I'm afraid it will take some time."

"If we could only send word on ahead, and have him stopped," suggested Bob.

"That's a good plan!" exclaimed the elder lad. "I wonder we didn't think of it before. I'll telegraph to several of the large cities that are ahead of us, and ask if there's any news of an airship having been seen in their vicinity."

"But will you wait here until you get answers?" inquired Ned.

"No," responded Jerry, after a moment's consideration. "We can ask that replies be sent to us at different places ahead of us. For instance, the next fair-sized town is Branchville, and the city beyond that is Canton. We can telegraph to the chief of police in Canton, and ask that a reply be sent to us to be called for at Branchville. See my plan?"

"It's a good one," commented Bob. It was at once put into operation, and that night several

inquiring messages were being clicked over the wires, while the boys went to bed to rest up for the search that lay before them.

They were on the road again, early the next morning, and while running to Branchville kept a keen watch on the sky overhead. But the only specks they saw were birds, and when they inquired for a telegram, and were handed one, they had small hopes of any success. Nor was there any news, the message from the Canton police chief being to the effect that no airship had been sighted near there.

"Well, we've got several other places to hear from before night," remarked Ned hopefully. "Let's get a move on us."

"Yes," agreed Jerry, "but we have several more messages to hear from before night," his tone, however, was not quite as confident as it had been.

"Then let's hit up the pace a little," suggested Bob. "Maybe we can get in all our telegrams before dark."

"Yes, I think we can stand a little more speed," said the steersman, as he shoved over the gasolene lever, and advanced his spark. "We'll hit up the pace."

"Be careful you don't get caught for speeding," cautioned Bob.

"Oh, I don't believe any of the constables in this country township have motorcycles with cyclometers on," spoke Jerry, with a laugh. The auto was now moving swiftly along, but at no illegal rate of speed. However, it was not more than ten minutes after this that, as the lads passed a cross road, they heard some one shout after them:

"Hold on there! You're goin' too fast!"

"Better slow up," advised Ned, after a swift glance at the man who had warned them. "There's a fellow with a motorcycle, Jerry. Maybe he's a constable."

"Oh, I guess not," was the response, for Jerry was anxious to get the next telegram, and the auto kept on.

"He's coming after us," announced Bob, when a backward glance had showed him the man in pursuit. "He's coming, Jerry!"

"I heard him," was the reply, as the explosions of the smaller machine sounded in the rear. "I hear him, but we'll be out of this township in a few minutes, and he hasn't any jurisdiction in the next, where they're more liberal in the matter of speed laws."

So on they kept, the man in the rear, on his motorcycle, calling to them, at intervals, to stop.

"There," announced Jerry, as he passed a mile

along through the air, over their heads. It was some sort of a balloon."

"Are you sure it was a balloon?" inquired Jerry.

"Well, some sort of a balloon," replied the farmer. "You see, there was some moonlight, but I couldn't make it out very well. It was an airship, I know, because I've seen pictures of 'em. It was shaped like a cigar, about a hundred feet long, or more, I guess, and sticking out from the sides, were big white wings. By Golly; but it scared me at first!"

"That's our airship!" cried Bob.

"Your airship?" inquired the farmer, visibly astonished.

"Yes, we are in search of one stolen from us in Cresville," said Jerry. "The one you saw may have been it. Which way was it going?"

"It come from that direction," replied the man, pointing back toward Cresville, "and it was headed almost west, along this road you're on now. First I knowed I heard a humming, buzzing sound, and I took a tight hold on the reins, as I thought an auto was coming. Then when I looked around, for the noise was in back of me, I seen a big light in the air. I thought it must be an all-fired big auto, that had a light so high up, and the

next I knew the blamed thing was right over my head, and not more than fifty feet up. Then I knowed it was an airship, but I come near knowing nothing else right after, for my horses started to run, and I had all I could do to hold 'em. Well, the airship, or whatever it was, swooped on out of sight in the darkness, and I didn't get my animals down to a walk for nearly a mile."

"And it was going this way?" asked Ned, pointing in the same direction as that in which the auto was headed.

"It was," answered the farmer. "But I don't believe you'll catch it. Them airship fellers don't leave any trail behind."

"Oh, we'll catch him!" cried Jerry, determinedly. "We're much obliged to you for this clew."

"Oh, you're welcome, I'm sure. Whenever anyone does me a good turn, I like to return the compliment. I hope you catch them," and the farmer was about to drive on. "But what makes you think that was your shebang?" he asked.

"From the peculiar shape of it," answered Jerry. "Ours is a combined dirigible balloon and aeroplane, and that's what you saw. Besides, it came from the right direction. Come on, fellows," he added. "We're on the trail at last. Now to catch Noddy Nixon!"

post, "we're out of his territory now, and he can't molest us." But the motor cyclist still came on, and, as Jerry slowed up, when nearing a curve, the man in the rear, with a sudden burst of speed, swung his machine ahead of the auto. Then, jumping off, after a quick stop, he placed himself right in the path, so that Jerry was obliged to stop, to avoid running him down.

"I've caught you!" cried the man. "Maybe you'll stop next time I yell at you! You exceeded the speed limits, and you're under arrest!"

"Who are you?" asked Jerry.

"I'm Constable Hedden of Analomick township, and you fellers was running nigh onto forty miles an hour. I can tell, because I've got a cyclometer that registers the truth. You're under arrest, and you'll have to come before Squire Nashfell," and the constable threw back his coat, to display a large star on his vest. "That's my authority," he added, proudly.

"Are you sure we were going too fast?" asked Jerry mildly, and his chums were surprised at his manner.

"Of course I am. Can't I tell by my register?"

"But we are out of your territory," put in Ned. "You have no right to arrest us in this township."

"That's all right," said Constable Hedden.

"You violated the speed law in Analomick township, and I can arrest you wherever I catch you; and I have you now!"

"Guess you didn't think of that, Jerry," remarked Bob in a low voice.

"Yes, I did," answered the tall lad, in a whisper. "Just keep still, and say nothing. You and Ned remain in the car. I'll settle with this fellow." Then, addressing the constable, Jerry went on: "Well, what are you going to do with us? We can't walk back to the office of the Squire with you, and leave our car here on the road. Can't you trust us to come back?"

"Not much! I got bit once, an' I ain't goin' to again. I'll ride back with you to the Squire's office, an' prefer a charge against you."

"What will you do with your motorcycle?" asked Ned, thinking he could "stump" the constable.

"Oh, I'll jest hide it here in the bushes," replied the man with a grin. Evidently he was well pleased with himself at having made such a haul. "I'm all ready for you automobile fellers these days," he continued. "I can hide my wheel where no one will see it. Then, when the court proceedings are over, you will have to bring me back here, and I'll get my machine."

"Suppose we refuse?" asked Bob, who saw visions of a late, if not an altogether postponed, supper.

"Oh, I guess you won't dare refuse to obey an order of the court," said Mr. Hedden. "I've got you right, an' the less trouble you make, the better off you'll be."

"All right," agreed Jerry, with an ease that surprised his chums. "Put your machine in the bushes, and get in."

"No monkey-business, now mind!" stipulated the constable. "If I catch you tryin' to run away from me, it'll go hard with you!"

Jerry said nothing, but there was a faint smile around his mouth, as he watched the constable carefully place the motor cycle in the bushes, where it was well out of sight. Then, as Mr. Hedden came back, the tall lad got out of the car, and began jacking up one of the front wheels, raising it, however, only a little way from the ground.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned, quickly.

"Keep still, and you'll see," answered Jerry. Then, when the constable came out of the bushes that official asked, in some surprise:

"What's the matter; got a puncture?"

"There might be," answered Jerry cautiously,

which was perfectly true. There might have been, only there wasn't.

The tall lad began a careful examination of the front wheel. He turned it slowly around, and his face wore a puzzled air.

"I had a puncture myself, one day," went on the official, "an' it took quite a while to find it."

Jerry did not reply. He went to the tool box, and got a wrench. Then, when he was applying it to one of the lugs that held the tire in place, the tool slipped from his hand, and went some distance across the dusty road.

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed the lad, as if in distress, and he held one hand in the other, as though he had hurt himself. Ned and Bob, in the tonneau, looked on anxiously.

"I'll get it for you!" cried the constable, desirous to be of some service. Probably he was in a hurry to get his prisoners arraigned, and fined, so he could collect his share.

The man with the big badge hurried across the road to where the wrench had fallen. For an innocent wrench it had traveled quite a distance, Ned thought.

No sooner was the man's back turned that Jerry, with a quick motion, sprang into the car. His hand sought the spark lever and swung it

over. The car could be "started on the spark" once it had been running for some time, and this was one of those times. In an instant the welcome explosions sounded, and, a moment later, Jerry threw in the clutch. Forward shot the auto, the jack under the front wheel offering scarcely any obstacle. It was left lying in the road while Jerry, throwing in the second speed, was soon far down the road, leaving a much-astonished constable staring after the auto and its occupants.

"Here you! Come back here!" he yelled. "That ain't fair to git away that way! It's a trick! Come back here!"

"Not to-day!" shouted Jerry, as he increased the speed. "You arrested us by a trick, and we got away by the same means. We're even. Besides, we weren't exceeding the speed limit, and you know it," which was the truth.

The constable, his face distorted with rage, ran to the bushes where he had left his motorcycle, but Jerry knew that long before he could get it out, and in motion, the auto would be so far away that pursuit would be out of the question.

"I guess we've seen the last of him," commented Ned, with a laugh. "That was a good trick, Jerry. I didn't see what you were up to at first."

"Was there really a puncture?" asked Bob.

"Of course not," answered Jerry. "I did that to gain time. Then I threw the wrench across the road, hoping he'd go after it. I knew I could start on three wheels, and that the jack wouldn't stop us, for I only raised it an inch from the ground. Well, we got out of that all right. Now for the next telegram."

Their next stop was at Varden, and the town they hoped to hear from was Platville. They found a message awaiting them in the telegraph office. Nervously Jerry tore it open.

"Any news?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"Yes," answered Jerry. "The message reads: 'Airship disabled about three miles from here. May be yours.' Fellows, I guess we've run down Noddy Nixon!"

CHAPTER VI

THE AIRSHIP RECOVERED

FOR a moment after Jerry's announcement to his chums, who were in the car, neither of them spoke. Then Ned said:

"Come on, let's start at once for Platville."

"Yes," agreed Bob, and, to his credit be it said that he did not propose stopping for supper, though he was very hungry.

"I think we'll have a bite to eat first," suggested Jerry. "We want to be in shape to tackle Noddy and Jack if we come up to them. It won't take long to have a meal, and then we'll go on."

Bob looked gratefully at his chum, and his face, that was beginning to wear a woe-begone expression, took on a more cheerful cast.

"I guess that will be a good plan," he said, and Ned laughed.

Platville was about fifty miles farther on, and they knew that in the darkness, for night was approaching, and over unfamiliar roads, they

would hardly get there before morning. But this suited them, as they knew they could scarcely do anything toward recovering the airship in the dark.

They went to a hotel where, while they were getting supper, the auto was looked over by a man from the garage, and some adjustments made. Then, with a fresh supply of gasolene and oil, the seekers after the *Comet* prepared to resume their journey. They inquired as to the best road to take, and Jerry sent a telegram to the chief of police of Platville, stating that the real owners of the airship were on their way to claim it. The chief was requested to send some one out to guard the craft, and see that the present occupants of it did not get away with it. To this telegram there was no answer.

The night journey was begun, and, while it was pleasant enough at the start, it was soon made miserable, for it began to rain, and the roads were slippery and dangerous, necessitating slow progress. At midnight they stopped at a roadside-inn to get something to eat, and inquire as to the progress they had made. The distance covered was rather disappointing.

"At this rate we won't get there until nearly noon," said Jerry.

"Well, there's one consolation. If the storm keeps up Noddy won't be likely to go off in the airship," remarked Ned. "He probably thinks he's far enough off now so that we can't catch him."

They kept on, the storm becoming worse as they proceeded. About two o'clock that morning they ran into a deep mud hole and it took them an hour to work the auto out.

When they had managed to extricate it, they were all wet through from the driving rain, and there was no chance to don dry garments, which they had in their suit cases.

"This is fierce!" exclaimed Jerry, as he resumed his place at the steering wheel. "If I had Noddy Nixon here now, I'd stick him, head first, in that mud puddle."

"Let me drive it for a while," suggested Ned, "and you go back in the tonneau with Bob."

To this Jerry agreed, for he was very tired and there was some protection under the top that covered the tonneau. He managed to get a little broken sleep, by curling up on the seat, while Ned directed the car along the muddy roads.

Morning came at last, and with it the spirits of the three boys rose somewhat. By signposts they learned that they were within ten miles of Plat-

ville, and, as they got on a highway that was not so soft, they could make better speed. They were soon in sight of the city, which nestled in a small valley.

"Now for a good hot breakfast!" exclaimed Bob, as he stretched out in his wet garments. "Then we'll feel better."

"The airship first!" insisted Ned, with a look at Jerry for confirmation.

"Oh, I think we can afford to change our clothes and get on some dry garments," said the older lad. "If the ship is disabled I don't fancy Noddy can repair it in a hurry."

"If it's damaged he'll pay for it!" exploded Bob vindictively, and his chums nodded.

They went to a hotel, and arranged for a room, for they could not tell how long they would have to stay. The clerk looked a little askance at the three rain-soaked lads who entered the lobby that early morning, but when he knew that they were autoists a different expression came over his face, and his manner was more cordial.

"Which means that he'll about double our bill," commented Jerry, as he and his chums went to their rooms.

They made hasty toilets, and, after a quick

breakfast they drove to the office of the chief of police.

"I don't know whether it's the machine you want or not," remarked that official, when they told their errand, "but there's an aeroplane down in a field about two miles outside of town. It came there yesterday afternoon, and seems to be out of kilter."

"Did you send a man out to guard it?" asked Jerry, anxiously.

"Man to guard it? No."

"We telegraphed you, asking you to do that," went on the widow's son. "The chaps who stole it may take a notion to keep on with it, after they get it fixed."

"I never got that second telegram," said the police officer. "I'm sorry. But I'll go right out with you now, and do all I can to help you get it back. Stealing airships, eh? What will happen next, I wonder?"

It was with anxious hearts that the three chums, accompanied by the chief, drove out in the auto to the field where the *Comet* was supposed to be. Would it still be there, or had Noddy and Jack managed to repair it, and continue their flight? These were questions that each of the three lads asked himself.

"Did you see the airship?" asked Jerry, of the chief.

"Yes, I went out to take a look at it yesterday afternoon, when I got your message," replied the official. "But as you didn't say that it was stolen, I didn't take any action. I supposed you were only one of the owners interested in seeing how far it had traveled."

"Who was in it?" asked Ned, eagerly.

"Well, there were two young fellows, and an old man. And the old man didn't seem to know much about airships. He was very quiet, but the two young men were quarreling between themselves as to who was responsible for the accident. It seems they lost the gas from the bag, and in coming down they broke one of the wings, if that's what you call 'em."

"I guess you mean one of the side planes," spoke Jerry. "Well, if that's all the damage, we can soon fix it. So Mr. Bell is still with them, eh? But we'll soon explain matters to him, and I guess he won't want anything more to do with Noddy Nixon and Jack Pender."

The auto swung around a bend in the road. The storm had ceased, and the weather was fine. As the boys looked off to the right they saw, glit-

tering in the sun, in a big field, a shape that was familiar to them. Bob uttered a cry.

"The *Comet!*"

"There she is!" shouted Ned enthusiastically.

"And not so badly damaged as I feared," added Jerry as his eyes took in the outlines of the airship.

"Better leave the auto here," suggested the chief. "That meadow is soft, after the rain, and you'll sink in."

They dismounted from the car, and eagerly ran across the field toward the airship, the chief following more slowly.

"There was quite a crowd out to see it yesterday," the official remarked, "but one of the boys, Pixon or Snixon I think his name was,—he acted so mean, and talked of shooting anyone who came too close,—that the crowd thought it would be healthier to keep away. Then, too, he said the gas was dangerous, and might kill people."

"Nonsense," said Jerry. "The only way it could kill anyone would be for that person to be shut up in a room full of it. There is no danger. But that's just like Noddy Nixon. I guess he didn't want news that the airship was here to get out."

"The man who owns the field made him pay for leaving it here over night," went on the chief of police.

As the three chums approached nearer and nearer to the craft they looked for signs of life about it. The *Comet* was resting on nearly an even "keel" in the midst of a big green meadow. But, look as they did, the motor boys saw no one.

Jerry, who was in the lead, was now within twenty-five feet of the comet. He was narrowly watching it, and suddenly he saw a figure emerge from the cabin.

"Hi there! Jack Pender!" cried the tall lad, as he broke into a run.

Jack Pender gave one look, uttered a warning yell, and then leaped over the side of the airship and ran across the meadow at full speed. An instant later another figure emerged from the cabin. It was that of Noddy Nixon. He, too, took in the situation at a glance, and saw the three motor boys and the chief of police.

Noddy tried to follow the example of Pender, his crony. He leaped over the side of the craft, but he was not so lucky in recovering his balance. Before he could run Jerry was upon him.

"Now I've got you!" cried the tall lad, shaking

Noddy by the collar. "I'll teach you to steal our airship!"

"You let me alone!" blustered Noddy, and he began to punch Jerry. This was more than Jerry could stand, and he turned in and gave the bully the best thrashing he had received in some time. It did not take long, either, for Jerry was thoroughly and righteously angry, and Noddy was like a lump of putty when it came to fighting. By the time Ned, Bob and the chief had come up, the bully was in a pitiable state.

"There, you get out of this, and thank your stars that you're not arrested on a serious charge," said Jerry indignantly, as he gave the ugly-faced lad a shove that sent him head-first into a puddle of water.

"You wait, Jerry Hopkins!" spluttered Noddy, as he got up. "I'll fix you for this," but he did not stay to talk further, for Jerry advanced toward him. Off over the fields, after Jack Pender, ran the discomfited bully.

"See anything of Mr. Bell?" inquired Ned, as he, with Bob and the chief, followed Jerry into the cabin of the airship.

"He doesn't seem to be around," was the answer.

It needed but a glance about the *Comet* to show that the hermit was not aboard.

"I guess he must have gone away in the night," said Bob.

"Probably he couldn't stand Noddy and Jack, or else he found out the trick they had played," suggested Jerry. "But now let's see what damage has been done, for we have our airship back again, and have routed the enemy," and he smiled as if something pleased him.

"Here's something that may give you a clew to things," commented the chief of police, handing a letter to Jerry.

"Where did you get it?" asked the lad.

"That chap dropped it when he was having that little argument with you," replied the official with a smile, as he thought of the strenuous "argument" that had taken place between Jerry and Noddy.

"It's a letter, addressed to Noddy," said Jerry, as he looked at it. "I think we're justified in reading it. Only part of it is here, but it may interest us." He read the fragment rapidly and a change came over his face.

"What is it?" asked Bob anxiously.

"This letter is from Tom Dalsett," replied Jerry. "Tom Dalsett, who with Noddy, Jack

Pender, and some others of that gang, made trouble for us in Mexico and at our Western mine. Dalsett writes to Noddy to come on out west, as he says he thinks there is a chance to beat us out of our claim to the gold mine, and put Jim Nestor, our foreman, out of possession."

"The idea!" cried Ned.

"Fellows," went on Jerry eagerly, "this is why Noddy was so anxious to get out West! He wants to steal our gold mine away from us, with the help of Dalsett and his gang. This letter is a valuable clew."

"But what of Jackson Bell, the hermit?" asked Ned.

"I don't know," answered Jerry, somewhat puzzled. "That is another part of the mystery. But we've got our work cut out for us now, boys. We've got to go West and protect our mine from the same gang who tried, once before, to get it away from us. We'll go in the airship, as soon as it's repaired. We caught Noddy just in time."

"And will we let Mr. Bell's friends, in the mysterious valley, suffer?" asked Bob.

"No, we'll save them, too, if we can. There are plenty of adventures ahead of us," finished Jerry, as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Do you want to arrest those two fellows?"

asked the chief, pointing in the direction taken by Noddy and Jack.

"No, let them go," advised Jerry. "We'll see if we can find Mr. Bell, and then we'll repair the ship and start for the West."

CHAPTER VII

A TRACE OF MR. BELL

THE BOYS were not long in assuring themselves that their airship had suffered no material damage. The lifting gas, which was contained in the big bag, had simply leaked away, and of course Noddy and Jack Pender did not know how to make any more. In consequence of this they had been obliged to use the craft simply as an aeroplane, the dirigible balloon feature being eliminated. They were evidently not enough skilled in aeronautics to keep the craft constantly in motion, and so it had descended in the field, one of the planes, and a deflecting rudder, being broken, but not beyond repair.

"Those fellows certainly lived high while they were aboard," grumbled Bob, after a visit to the storeroom. "They have wasted as much stuff as they ate."

"And I suppose that worries you," suggested Jerry, with a smile. "Never mind, Chunky, as

long as we have our airship back we won't complain."

"Not after the way you licked Noddy," added Ned. "I was wishing I could have a hand in it, but you finished him off too quick for me."

"Yes, I fancy he'll remember it for a few hours," put in the chief of police. "Well, boys," he added, "is there anything I can do for you? Do you want me to make a search for this Nixon fellow and the other one, or for this Mr. Bell? Is he a criminal, too?"

"Oh, no, he is a very good friend of ours," Jerry hastened to say. "He is an old man, who once was a sort of hermit out West, near a lost lake that very few persons knew about. We found him and restored a long-lost son to him. But we have not seen him since. Accidentally we learned that he was with these two bullies in the airship, though why we don't exactly know. But we certainly don't want him arrested, though he seems to have disappeared."

There was no doubt of it. Jackson Bell was not in the craft, though whether he had recently left, or had gone some time before the arrival of the three chums, was impossible to say.

"Well, if I can't do anything for you I think I'll go back to town," went on the chief.

"Yes," agreed Jerry, "and Ned and Bob had better go with you, in the auto. I'll stay here," continued the tall youth, "and guard the airship. You and Bob, Ned, can buy the things necessary with which to repair it, and we'll make a flight from here as soon as we can get it in shape."

"To rescue Mr. Bell and his friends?" asked Bob, who was contentedly munching a sandwich he had made from some canned chicken he found among the stores.

"Hardly, unless we can tell where they are," answered Jerry. "We'll go west to protect our mine, for this looks as if there was another conspiracy on foot against us," and he held up the letter that had fallen from Noddy's pocket. "We'll have to teach Tom Dalsett and that gang another lesson, I guess. I only hope Jim Nestor will be on his guard. I think we'd better send him a telegram of warning, and let him know we are coming. I'll write it, and you fellows can take it to town when you go in the auto."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," advised Bob. "I think I'll make another sandwich. Don't you want one?" and he started for the kitchen of the airship.

"Here, you cut that out!" ordered Ned, good-naturedly. "Work first and eat afterward."

Bob looked a little disconsolate, but complied with his friend's desire. Jerry had quickly written a telegram, and given it to Ned, who, with Bob and the chief of police, started across the field to where the auto had been left. They were soon speeding toward town.

Left alone in the airship Jerry strolled about it, taking note of the various features, and marking with displeasure where the carelessness of Noddy and Jack had done some slight damage.

The *Comet* is fully described in the ninth book of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys in the Clouds," but perhaps a brief statement of the wonderful craft may not be out of place here. The airship consisted of two sections. There was the big cigar-shaped bag, which contained the gas, and which formed the dirigible balloon part of the ship. This bag was filled with a strong lifting vapor, of secret composition.

Then there was the aeroplane feature, the big wings being fitted at right angles to the gas bag, and strongly braced. Thus the *Comet* could be used as a balloon, or, at the will of the occupants, or in case of accident, could glide along like an aeroplane.

Below the big bag was the body of the ship, consisting of an enclosed framework, divided into

several compartments. There was a living room, or cabin, a room where several berths provided ample sleeping accommodations, the motor or engine room, and a cooking galley. From the engine room the big propellers, two of them, could be controlled, as could also the rudders, one designed to send the ship to right or left, and the other to elevate or depress it. There was a small pilot house for the steersman, and windows in the cabin affording a view on all sides, while heavy glass ones in the bottom of the car enabled the occupants to look down on the earth below. There were lockers for the storage of food, supplies and the necessary materials for making the lifting gas on board, so that, if necessary, the bag could be filled even while the ship was in motion.

Jerry walked all about the craft, noting every feature. He saw that comparatively few repairs would be needed before he and his chums could set sail in it.

"Then we'll start for the west," Jerry said, talking to himself. "We'll have to hustle to beat Noddy and that gang, for they evidently expect to get that gold mine away from us if they can. Then there's this matter of Mr. Bell. I can't understand that at all. Why was he with Noddy? What did he want of an airship? Was he real-

ly here at all, or was it some one who looked like him, and who helped Noddy to steal our *Comet?* I wish I could answer those questions. Maybe it wasn't Mr. Bell, after all. It might have been one of the Dalsett gang, dressed up to represent him."

As he thought of this possibility Jerry became uneasy. He began to wish Bob and Ned would return, for he feared Noddy might come back at any minute, accompanied by some of the scoundrels with whom he associated, and regain possession of the airship. But, as he thought of the broken plane, and realized that there was scarcely any gas in the bag, Jerry knew that whoever came could not run away with the flying craft.

He walked through the cabin again, and near one of the seats he noticed some torn pieces of paper. Idly he picked them up, and, as he scanned them, thinking more of the recent events he had passed through than of anything else, he saw that the fragments bore writing. One of the pieces contained a name—Thomas Bell—and at the sight of that Jerry uttered a cry:

"Tommy Bell!" he exclaimed. "Why that's the name of Mr. Bell's son—the one we rescued from the Mexicans! This looks like a letter written to him, and afterward destroyed. I wonder

if I can make out anything from it? I'll try, for maybe he and Mr. Bell are in trouble, and I can help them."

With nervous fingers Jerry sought to piece together the fragments of the torn letter. But it was not all there. Only disconnected words could be made out, but from these the tall lad decided that it was a missive written by Jackson Bell to his son, but, for some reason, torn up before it was sent. And from the words he could decipher Jerry felt that he held in his hands some clew to the mystery—the mystery of the air, which Mr. Bell had set out to solve with Noddy and Jack, who had deceived him. For Jerry read such words as "will try to help them," "can now get to the deep valley," "they may yet be alive," "Noddy is friend of the motor boys——"

"That's where he's wrong," commented Jerry, grimly. Then he found a larger fragment, which he had overlooked. It contained these words: "and so Tommy, my boy, you may soon expect me back in the west, and together we will go to the aid of those people, some of whom were my friends, so long and so mysteriously lost. I feel that we can save them in the airship, which I thought of as a last resort, after reading what Jerry Hopkins and his chums had done in their

wonderful craft. I will soon be with you. JACKSON BELL."

"Jackson Bell!" cried Jerry, springing to his feet, and staring at the signature on the scrap of paper. "Then Mr. Bell has been here—in this ship—there is no doubt of it! He wrote this letter to his son, but it was torn up, and never posted. Can there have been foul play here? Have Noddy and Jack made away with Mr. Bell?" The thought was too terrible. Jerry dismissed it at once, yet he could not help adding:

"The mystery is deepening. There are three puzzles now to solve. How to save our mine, how to rescue the people of the valley, and how to find Mr. Bell."

CHAPTER VIII

HOME IN THE AIRSHIP

JERRY sat in the cabin of the *Comet,* staring at the fragment of paper bearing the signature of Mr. Bell. Many thoughts were in the mind of the lad. He was worried and puzzled. Clews seemed to point to a sudden departure of the former hermit from the airship. The torn letter was one of them.

"Of course," reasoned Jerry, "Mr. Bell may have written the letter, and then, desiring to change something in it, he may have destroyed it, and written another, which he sent. But it looks as if he had hurried away from this ship." This was true enough, for, all about, were evidences of a hasty flight. Bits of paper and string were scattered about, as if some one had packed up on short notice.

"But if Mr. Bell wrote to his son that he was coming in an airship to help rescue some people in a mysterious valley, why isn't he on hand now?"

reasoned Jerry, questioning himself. "Surely a slight accident to the *Comet* wouldn't scare him. He ought to be around here, waiting for Noddy to fix it. But he isn't. Evidently something happened just before we arrived on the scene."

Jerry was right in this surmise, but it was not until some time afterward that he learned what had taken place, and the reason for the letter being torn up and scattered about the cabin.

Still musing on the mute evidence of the mystery, Jerry began a search for more fragments, thinking that, if he had the whole letter, he could piece it together. He was interrupted in his search by a shout from without, and he hurried out on deck. To his relief he saw Ned and Bob approaching, carrying as many packages as their arms would hold.

"Are you all right, Jerry?" called Ned, anxiously.

"All right," responded his chum, "and I've made a great discovery."

"Have you found Mr. Bell?"

"No, but something concerning him. Come aboard. Did you get the things to fix the airship?"

"Yes; everything."

"Then come here; I've got news for you," and,

as his chums crowded closer, Jerry told them of finding the scraps of the mysterious letter. They eagerly scanned the fragments, making many comments on them, but agreeing, in general, with Jerry's view.

For some time they talked over the possibilities of what might have happened, and they concluded that the thing to do was to leave for the west as soon as possible.

"We'll make a trip over the Rockies," declared Jerry, "and clear up this mystery. But the first thing to do, is to repair the airship."

The bundles Bob and Ned had brought from town consisted of piano wire and bamboo poles, for strengthening the frame of the aeroplane, stout canvas for mending the torn places, some chemicals for making the gas, and other supplies. The packages were opened and the contents spread out on the deck. Then another inspection of the *Comet* was made to determine what to repair first. Jerry made up a sort of schedule, giving himself as well as his two chums enough work to keep them busy all that day.

It was well that the three lads had assisted Mr. Glassford in the manufacture of the airship, for now they were at no loss as to how to proceed. They knew every inch of the craft, and, if neces-

sary, could have taken it apart and put it together again.

They worked rapidly, and were about to stop for dinner, in response to several impatient and pathetic consultations that Bob gave his watch, when, across the meadows, quite a crowd was seen approaching the stalled airship.

"Here comes a lot of curiosity seekers," announced Ned.

"Well, we can't help it, and we've got to expect it," answered Jerry. "Make the best of it, but don't let any of 'em come aboard. They may do some damage."

The throng consisted, for the most part, of boys and men, though there were a few young women in it. They all gazed at the airship in open-mouthed wonder, but they showed a commendable desire to keep some distance back.

"I guess Noddy's bluff about the gas being likely to explode, or kill people, was a good thing," announced Ned. "It will keep them back."

The boys made a hasty lunch, and reviewed their work of repairing the ship. The crowd grew larger and completely surrounded the stalled *Comet*. Toward the middle of the afternoon the throng was very dense, and some of the lads in it, becoming bold, by the fact that nothing had hap-

pened, began to run up on the deck when Jerry, Ned and Bob were off to one side.

"There'll be trouble if we don't look out," said Jerry in a low voice to his chums. "Here, you get out of that!" he yelled to a daring youngster who had entered the pilot house, and was yanking on the wheels and levers.

Others in the crowd, emboldened by the feat of this lad, began to climb upon the airship, and our heroes would soon have been overwhelmed by eager, if kindly, curious investigators. The trouble, however, was speedily over, for several police officers unexpectedly arrived on the scene, and reported to Jerry. They said they had been sent out by the chief, who had instructed them to keep the crowd back.

This they at once proceeded to do, and the lads were not further hampered by the throng, but could proceed with the repair work in peace.

That night the most of it was done, and the following day, after sleeping on board the *Comet,* it was resumed. The crowd was larger than ever the second day, but more police were on hand and no harm resulted. Late that afternoon Jerry announced that he was ready for a trial flight.

"Are you going to put right for Cresville?" asked Bob.

"No, we'll go up a short distance, circle around, and see how the ship behaves," answered Jerry. "Then we'll start for home in the morning. We'll need a little time to stock up the cupboard, Chunky," and the tall lad winked at Ned, while Bob blushed at this tribute to his eating powers.

"Yes, and we'll have to arrange to have the auto taken care of," added Ned.

"We'll ship that home by freight," decided Jerry.

It was soon circulated through the crowd that the airship was going to ascend, and the people crowded up so close that it was with difficulty that the boys could move about. But when Jerry, speaking loudly on purpose, told Ned and Bob to start the gas generating machine, there was a sudden movement of the big audience.

"That made 'em skedaddle!" exclaimed Ned with a laugh, though there was no danger.

In a short time the big gas bag was filled with the powerful vapor, and the airship began tugging at the guy ropes with which it was fastened to the earth. The boys looked carefully over every part, and then entered the cabin, to see that the controlling mechanism was in working order.

"I'll steer first," said Jerry. "Ned, you and

Bob be ready to cast off the ropes when I give the word."

The tall lad took his place in the pilot house. The indicator connected with the gas machine showed that enough vapor had been made to raise the ship without the use of the aeroplane feature. Jerry shut off the gas, and pulled the lever to get the planes and rudders in the right position.

"All ready?" he asked his chums.

"All ready," replied Bob and Ned.

Everyone in the crowd seemed to be holding his breath.

"Cast off!' cried Jerry, and his chums released the holding ropes. Up shot the big airship, like a bird released from captivity. The crowd yelled and cheered. Up and up went the *Comet.* Then Jerry started the two big propellers, and the craft darted forward. Sending it up about a thousand feet, Jerry guided the ship about in a series of evolutions, designed to test the various planes and rudders. To his delight, it answered the helm perfectly. Noddy's possession of the ship had, seemingly, not permanently harmed it any. Back and forth, around in circles and through figure eights, went the *Comet,* while the crowd below looked up in wonder.

"I guess it's all right," announced Jerry, after about an hour's test. "We'll go down, now."

"Down she goes!" cried Bob.

So perfectly was the airship under control that Jerry landed it in almost exactly the same spot from where he had arisen. There was applause from the crowd at this feat of steersmanship.

There were only a few more adjustments to make before the *Comet* would be ready for the long trip to Cresville, and from there she would be sent over the Rocky Mountains.

The crowd lingered until dark, and then dispersed. Jerry went into town, and arranged to have the auto shipped home, and also paid a visit to the chief of police, thanking him for the services of himself and his men. Then Jerry went back to where his chums were on the airship.

In the morning, before a curious crowd had time to assemble, the motor boys had started the engines of the *Comet,* and were soon up amid the clouds, heading straight for Cresville.

"And the biggest part of our journey is still to come," observed Ned, gazing down toward the earth.

"Yes, and the most mysterious," spoke Bob, but neither he nor his chums knew how many wonderful things were before them.

CHAPTER IX

PROFESSOR SNODGRASS ON HAND

CRESVILLE was reached, without incident, in much less time than the journey had taken our friends in the auto. They had but one slight accident. A leak was discovered in one of the compartments of the gas bag, but no stop was made to repair it, as the ship could be used independently of the bag, as an aeroplane. The leak was of small importance from the fact that the bag was divided into several sections, so that if one or two were emptied of gas the *Comet* would still be buoyant.

"Here we are!" announced Ned, the same afternoon that they had left Platville, and he looked toward a town that was looming up into sight. "There's Cresville."

The boys' parents were anxiously awaiting their arrival for, though they had been informed by telegraph of the success of the quest, they did not

know all that had taken place. The story of the chase, and the disappearance of Mr. Bell, was soon told.

"Is Noddy Nixon back in town?" inquired Bob, of his father.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Baker. "But I wouldn't have anything to do with him, if I were you."

"We don't intend to," spoke Ned, "only we'd like to get on the track of that mystery."

Inquiries, however, showed that Noddy had not come back. Nor had Jack Pender, and as Mr. Nixon was a man who never considered that his son did wrong, there was little use in appealing to him.

"We'll work this out ourselves," decided Jerry, and his chums agreed with him. The airship was housed in the shed, and, when the broken bolts on the big front doors had been repaired, Sud Snuffles was again placed in charge, with strict orders to admit no one except the motor boys, or some one accompanied by them.

"And you can make up your minds that I'll be careful," declared Sud, feeling of the lump on his head, which swelling was still in evidence. "They'll have to get rid of me first, before they get in this shed now."

That night there was a consultation among the motor boys and their parents. Jerry showed the letter Noddy had dropped, which seemed to indicate that an attempt would be made on the part of Noddy and his cronies to get control of the gold mine in Arizona.

"I think we ought to go out there," declared Jerry, "to protect our mine, and also to see if we can't locate Mr. Bell and his mysterious friends, whom he is so anxious to aid."

"Oh, Jerry, are you going on another one of those dangerous trips?" exclaimed Mrs. Hopkins, in much anxiety.

"It's not so dangerous, mother. We always come safely back from them."

"You have, so far," remarked Mr. Slade. "But there is no telling. I don't much fancy airships."

"They are safer than automobiles," declared Bob. "You can't hit anything in the air."

"No, but you can come down and hit the earth pretty hard," observed his father, grimly.

"Oh, but we don't intend to come down," said Ned. "Can't we go, dad?"

The parents considered the matter in a sort of executive session, the boys being barred. Finally the lads were called into the library of Mrs. Hopkins's home, where the conference was taking

place. The boys looked anxiously at the faces of the older folks.

"Well?" inquired Jerry nervously.

"You may go," replied his mother, with a little catch in her voice. "But you must promise to be very careful. You are going on a long trip—across the Rocky Mountains, as I understand it—and there may be all sorts of dangers."

"Oh, we'll be careful," readily promised Jerry, and his chums eagerly assented.

Once all objections to their trip were removed, the boys lost no time in making their preparations. There was little to do to the *Comet* as it was nearly ready for a flight across the continent, but supplies and provisions must be put aboard and these took some time. At length, however, all was in readiness.

"I think we'll give it a trial to-morrow," said Jerry to his chums one night. "I want to see how the deflecting rudder works since I changed the angle. Then, if all is well, we'll start the next day."

As the three chums were about ready to start on the little test trip the following day, having run the airship out of the shed, they heard voices in conversation on the side of the gas bag opposite to them.

"Oh, would you dare take a trip?" asked some one, evidently, from the tones, a young lady.

"I would if they asked me, but I don't suppose they will," was the reply.

Jerry looked under the bag, and caught a glimpse of three girls. Without changing his position, he called out:

"You may consider that you are asked, Mollie. Would you and Helen and Alice like to take a little trip?"

"Oh, my goodness me! I didn't s'pose anyone was around!" exclaimed Mollie Horton, who lived near Ned Slade.

"Don't you dare go one step in it!" cried Alice Vines, while Helen Gale, another chum, joined her protest.

"How are you, girls?" greeted Jerry, as he and his companions went around where they could see the young ladies. "You may come for a trip, if you like. We're not going very high, and there's not the slightest danger."

"Will you go, girls?" asked Mollie, of her friends.

They hesitated. Clearly they would like the experience, yet they hardly dared. While they were debating with themselves they were startled by hearing some one exclaim:

"Here we go—up in the air—above the clouds —down again—sail like a bird—turn a somersault—hit a star—bound for the moon—whoop! May I go?"

"You may if you will say that all over again, and repeat it slowly, backwards, Andy," stipulated Jerry, as he caught sight of the excitable little chap. Andy tried, but it was of no use. His tongue got all "twisted" as Bob said. However, the small lad was so enthusiastic over a chance for a trip, and he seemed so fearless that the terrors of Alice and Helen were overcome, after a little more persuasion, in which Mollie did her share. The three girls and Andy Rush entered the cabin, not, however, without many exclamations, half of anxiety and half of pleasure. Then Jerry and his chums started the power, and they were soon sailing through the air. Owing to the timidity of the young ladies no very great height was reached, though Andy was constantly urging Jerry to go above the clouds. They descended without anything having happened.

"Why, how simple it all is!" exclaimed Alice Vines, as she stepped on the ground again.

"Yes, it's easier than managing an automobile," added Helen Gale.

"Except in a big wind," said Jerry. "We'll take you out in a storm, sometime."

"No, thank you," objected Mollie. "We're much obliged as it is," and then the girls waved a farewell to the boys.

The weather the following day proved all that could be desired. The boys were up early, for there were several small matters to attend to, but finally all was in readiness for the start over the Rockies.

Jerry had safely put away the letter Noddy had dropped, and he had the torn fragments of the one written by Mr. Bell. He thought he might need them as evidence.

There was quite a crowd assembled at the airship shed to see the start, and the parents of our heroes were there.

"Be sure and drop a letter occasionally," called Mrs. Hopkins, to her son, and Jerry promised, while Ned and Bob also agreed to write to their parents.

"Is everything all right?" asked Jerry of his chums. He was in the pilot house, and his two companions were on deck.

"All ready to cast off," announced Bob.

"Then let her go!" cried Jerry. "Good-bye, everybody!"

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" shouted their friends and parents.

"Good-bye!" cried Bob and Ned in a chorus.

They were about to release the ropes holding the airship to the earth when there was a sudden commotion in the crowd. It seemed to separate into two parts, and through the middle came running an odd figure.

It was that of a small man, with a bald head, which was easily discernible since his hat had fallen off. He was running as fast as he could.

"Hold on! Hold on, boys!" he cried. "Wait for me. I want to go with you!" His coat tails were flying out behind him like sails. Over one shoulder was a long-handled butterfly net, and slung on his back was a green box. The cover of the box had come open, and from it were falling all sorts of bugs, toads, lizards and insects. "Wait! Wait!" cried the little man. "Don't go without me! I want to capture a new kind of flying lizard. Wait! Wait!"

Ned and Bob held on to the partly loosened guy ropes. The little man looked at the departing airship, and glanced back along the route he had traveled through the crowd—a route marked by all sorts of flying, creeping and hopping things.

"Wait, oh, wait, I beg of you!" he pleaded. "Am I too late? I must get that flying lizard!"

"Professor Snodgrass!" gasped Jerry, as he caught sight of the odd figure. "You're just in time, Professor!" he shouted, leaning from the window of the pilot house. "Hold the ship for a minute, Bob and Ned, until the professor gets aboard. We never could go without him!"

CHAPTER X

OFF FOR THE WEST

PROFESSOR SNODGRASS fairly leaped aboard the airship. Bob and Ned, abandoning their work of casting off the ropes, which they again fastened, held out their hands to him, and he grasped them firmly.

"Safe on board!" gasped the scientist. "I feared I would be left!"

"You're all right!" shouted an enthusiastic admirer in the throng.

"That's right," added Andy Rush. "Come at last minute—almost left—rush on board—never mind the crowd—jump in the air—fall down—get up—see the bugs! Whoop!"

"Bugs? Bugs? What bugs? Are there any bugs I can capture here?" asked the professor turning around to face the crowd from the deck of the airship. Evidently he was unaware that his specimen box had come open in his flight, and

that his path was strewn with creeping and crawling things.

"Bugs! I should say there were bugs!" exclaimed a woman. "One of the terrible creatures is on me now! It has seven wings and about fifty legs! Ugh! Take him off me, somebody; do!"

"Seven wings!" cried the professor, excitedly. "Why, my dear madam, that is one of the most wonderful and rare creatures in existence! There is only one known, and I have it. It is a sort of dragon-fly-centipede. Don't move, I beg of you, and I will capture it in a moment. I wonder where it came from?"

"From your box, Professor," said Jerry, coming from the pilot house. "Your box is open and——"

"Oh, my good gracious! So it is!" exclaimed the scientist with a groan. "All my valuable insects have escaped! That seven-winged centipede is one of them. Help me to capture them, boys, I beg of you!"

"Everybody get busy!" sang out Andy Rush. "Capture the professor's specimens!"

"I'll kill this seven-winged beast if some one doesn't take it off me!" screamed the woman.

"Don't! Don't! I beg of you! Handle it

gently," pleaded Uriah Snodgrass, as he prepared to get off the airship. "I will take it from you in a minute," and he got his small net ready.

"There's some sort of a toad crawling up my leg!" yelled a man. "Do you want that, Professor?"

"Do I want it? I should say I did, my dear sir. That is related to the celebrated horned toad that I captured after a long chase, on a journey to California. Please hold it for me. I will be there in a moment; as soon as I have captured the seven-winged centipede."

"Will it bite?" asked the man, as he gingerly extended his hand toward the reptile.

"It's as harmless as an elephant," responded Mr. Snodgrass enthusiastically, for to him one animal was very like another; he feared none, and they all seemed to like him.

By this time Bob, Ned and Jerry were laughing so heartily that they could not be of much service to their friend. He seemed all unconscious of the excitement he had created in the crowd, and his only desire was to recapture his specimens. There was an uneasy movement in the throng, as women or girls found themselves confronted by a snake or a lizard.

"Don't hurt any of them, I beg of you," plead-

ed the professor. "I will soon have all my beauties safe," and with a quick motion he captured the curious insect that had lighted on the woman who first gave the alarm.

"Beauties!" exclaimed another woman, with a sniff. "Look what he calls 'beauties!' " and she pointed at a squatty toad that was trying to hide under a stone.

"Don't step on it," cried the scientist. "I'll have it safe in a moment," and, with a quick motion, he cast the net over it, and transferred the toad to the green box.

"There's some sort of a big bee trying to sting me!" came a boy's voice, from the outer edge of the crowd. "I'm going to swat it good and hard if it does."

"No, don't! Pray don't!" pleaded Uriah Snodgrass. "That is the only specimen of a buzzless bumble bee that I have ever seen. It is very valuable. If it stings you just stand still, and it can't get away. Then I'll catch it. Don't disturb it if it stings you!"

"Hu! Guess I'd like to see myself!" retorted the boy. Then he gave a yell. "It's stinging me now!" he screamed. "I'm going to swat it good and hard!"

"Wait! Wait!" begged the professor, as he

tried to get through the crowd to where the lad was, hopping about in pain. Just then the youth yelled again.

"It's flown off me," he said, "and it's on John Stubb now! Look out, John, or it will bite you!"

"You put it on me on purpose," complained John. "I'll kill it!"

But by this time Professor Snodgrass was on hand and had made a prisoner of the buzzless bumble bee.

Then a woman reported that a snake was coiled up in front of her, and about to strike, and the scientist hastened over and captured that, stating that the snake was a harmless one. By this time the three motor boys, and some of their friends, had managed to capture most of the other specimens, and restore them to the green box. The crowd quieted down, and Uriah Snodgrass made a hasty examination to see if he had all his treasures.

"Any missing?" asked Jerry, trying not to laugh at his eccentric friend.

"There seems to be a pink flea gone," was the answer. Then, addressing the throng, the scientist asked: "Has anyone a pink flea?"

"My dog has lots of fleas, but I don't know

whether they're pink or red," replied an irreverent youth, and there was a laugh, which ended when a little girl cried out:

"There's something like a pink mosquito biting me, mister."

"Ha! That may be it. Let it bite you, little girl. It won't hurt much," the professor said, hurrying to the child. Then he gave a delighted cry. "It's my pink flea! A very valuable specimen! Now I have all of them back again. You may start the airship, boys. I'll have to put a new lock on my specimen box, I guess."

"Do you really want to go with us?" asked Jerry, for there had been no time to question the professor since his excited arrival.

"Of course I do, boys," he answered.

"But we are going away out West, out in Arizona, to our gold mine, and perhaps farther—across the Rockies."

"I'll go wherever you go," was the answer of the little bald-headed scientist. "I am searching for a flying lizard for the museum with which I am connected, and I may as well look for it in the Rockies as anywhere else. Go ahead, boys, I'll accompany you."

"All right," agreed Jerry, deciding that they

could question the professor later as to how he had come to know of their intended trip. "Cast off, Bob—Ned."

"Cast off she is," responded the two, sailor fashion, as they again loosened the guy ropes.

"There they go!" shouted the crowd, waving hands, hats and handkerchiefs, as the motor ship trembled slightly.

"Good-bye!" shouted the parents of the boys.

"Good-bye," chorused the throng.

"Up they go—to the clouds—out of sight—fall down—get up again—fly like the wind—hit the moon—bounce off—come back—kill a grizzly bear—upside down—right again—there they go!" yelled a shrill voice, and it needed no one to tell the boys that it was Andy Rush.

The last rope was cast off, and the *Comet,* with a rush, went straight up. Jerry, in the pilot house, pulled over the lever controlling the motor and the big propellers began to revolve. The airship darted ahead, sailing over the heads of the crowd. The motor boys were off for the west.

CHAPTER XI

A TOWN IN TROUBLE

FOR a few minutes after rising in the airship, the boys were busy adjusting machinery and looking at various gauges to see that everything was running smoothly. The *Comet* had never behaved better, and was sailing along like a bird.

"Some class to this, eh?" inquired Bob, who, in addition to his appetite, had another failing—that of using slang occasionally.

"She's running as well as we could expect, and a little better, considering the treatment she had at the hands of Noddy Nixon," responded Jerry. "I'll speed her a bit, now."

He adjusted the lever controlling the motor and propellers, and the big blades, in front of the airship, that served to pull it forward, whizzed around so swiftly that they looked like blurs of light. Then, fastening the side rudder, so that the craft would head due west, Jerry left the pilot house, and joined his companions in the main

cabin, where Professor Snodgrass was busy looking over his specimens, to ascertain if any had suffered harm when they escaped from the box during his rush through the crowd.

"How did you happen to hear we were going to make another trip, Mr. Snodgrass?" asked Bob.

"Why, your father mentioned it in a letter I had from him a few days ago," answered the scientist. "I wrote, as I do, once in a while, to inquire how you all were, and when he replied he stated that you were going on a trip West, but he did not say what for. As it happened, the museum with which I am now connected, and for which I travel, collecting specimens, needed a flying lizard. They are very scarce, and only one museum that I know of has a specimen. So I decided to get another. These lizards are supposed to exist in certain parts of our country, and I think the west is as likely to contain them as is any other section. So as soon as I learned you were going there I hastily packed up, and came along. But I very nearly missed you."

"Yes, a few minutes more and we would have been gone," observed Ned. "But you didn't bring your trunk with you, Professor."

"No, I couldn't manage it with my box of

specimens, spare cases in which to put new specimens I may get, my net and other things," and, truly, it did seem as if the professor could not have carried another thing, for every pocket bulged with something, and over his shoulders and around his waist were strapped boxes and cases, besides various nets, and other instruments he used in his capture of insects and reptiles. "I will buy extra clothing at the first place we stop," went on the scientist. "But you boys haven't yet told me why you are going West, and your father didn't mention it, Bob."

"We are going out to inspect our mine," spoke Jerry quickly, at the same time guardedly motioning to Bob and Ned not to say anything about the incident of Jackson Bell, the former hermit. "We have heard that some one may try to get possession of it and we want to stop him." Jerry decided it would be just as well, for the present, not to mention the trouble they had had with Noddy Nixon, and he also resolved to keep silent regarding the strange mystery they hoped to solve.

"Well, your plans will not be interfered with by me," continued Uriah Snodgrass. "I will go anywhere you do, and look for the flying lizard." The professor went on, and told of his hurried trip to Cresville, that he might join his friends.

They talked of former trips, of his pursuit of the wonderful butterfly in the everglades of Florida, and of his search for the horned toad in California.

All this while the airship kept on, increasing her distance from the home of the boys. Jerry had sent the *Comet* up about two thousand feet, and finding favorable currents of air there kept her in that position. It was an easy matter to go higher or lower as they desired.

In about an hour, during which time many reminiscences had been exchanged, Bob exhibited signs of uneasiness.

"What's the matter, Chunky?" inquired Ned. "Has one of the professor's pink fleas got inside your clothes?"

"I sincerely trust not," said the scientist in apprehension.

"No, it isn't that," replied the stout lad, somewhat awkwardly. "I—er—that is—I was just wondering if I hadn't better go and see about getting dinner."

"Dinner? Why, you lobster, it's only ten o'clock!" cried Jerry.

"I know it," answered Bob, "but I'll have to start the gasolene stove, and it will take some

time. I guess I'd better begin. I'll cook," he added, generously.

"Cook! I guess that's about all you *will* do on this trip," remarked Ned with a laugh, as his fleshy chum disappeared in the galley. "I never saw such a chap—never," he added.

"Well," remarked Professor Snodgrass, trying to think of some excuse for Bob, "we have to eat, you know. Even horned toads and flying lizards eat. And—one moment I beg of you—don't move, please!" he exclaimed suddenly to Ned.

"Why not; am I going to fall overboard?" inquired the lad, in some alarm.

"No, but a new and rare kind of upper-air mosquito has just alighted on your shoulder," spoke the professor, eagerly. "One moment and I will have it!" He stretched out his hand, containing a tiny net, and the next moment the insect was buzzing in it.

"Ah, I have you, little beauty!" exclaimed the bald-headed man, enthusiastically, and into a small bottle went the mosquito.

"I'm glad he didn't bite me," remarked Ned, who, just then saw Jerry beckoning to him from the pilot house. When the two chums were to-

gether, Jerry cautioned Ned about speaking of the possible solution of the mystery connected with Mr. Bell.

"Don't say anything about it to the professor," said Jerry. "We'll wait until we get to the mine, and see how matters develop there. It may be that there is nothing to this, and that we are on the wrong track about Mr. Bell," but it was not long before Jerry was to learn that there was even more in the mystery than he suspected. "Tell Bob," he went on to Ned. "Then you can help him with grub. I'm beginning to feel a little hungry myself."

The meal was served at noon, about a mile high in the air, with the *Comet* shooting along at the rate of fifty miles an hour, for the wind was favorable.

"It doesn't seem so much of a novelty now," remarked Bob, munching a sandwich, and looking down at the green earth spread out below him. "I remember the first trip we made I was a little nervous."

"Well, I was the time when the professor nearly fell overboard trying to capture a queer insect," said Jerry. "Don't do anything like that again, please, Mr. Snodgrass," he added.

"I'll not," agreed the scientist, who was trying to eat, and at the same time enter in his note book some observations about insects of the upper air.

Until the middle of the afternoon, the travelers flew along, high in the air. About three o'clock, when Ned was steering in the pilot house, there came a sudden gust of wind that heeled the airship over at a sharp angle.

"Quick! Try the lower currents!" called Jerry, from the engine room. "It may be quieter down near the earth."

Ned shifted the deflecting rudder, and the *Comet* shot earthward on a long slant. As Jerry had predicted, it was more quiet there, the wind blowing gently.

Their course was now southwest, and, judging by the speed and the length of time they had been in motion, they figured that the airship was over Pennsylvania. As it raced along, about five hundred feet above the surface, and over a rather sparsely settled country, Bob, who was looking through a telescope, suddenly uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry.

"Why there's a big crowd just ahead there," replied the fat lad. "About two thousand people on the bank of a river. It looks as if something had happened."

"Maybe some one has fallen in," suggested Ned.

"Speed her up, and we'll soon find out," directed Jerry, and Ned yanked over the propeller lever.

As the airship came nearer, it could be seen that there were two good-sized towns, one on either side of a swiftly flowing river, that appeared to be swollen from floods. Gathered on the banks of the stream were two large crowds, and they appeared to be signalling to each other.

"I wonder what's happened?" came from Ned.

"We'll soon find out," answered Jerry. "Go a bit slower."

"There's trouble of some kind; that's sure," was the opinion of Professor Snodgrass. "The people in the larger town seem to be in distress."

Hardly had he spoken than from the midst of the larger crowd there came a flash of fire, and a volume of white smoke rolled out. Then came a dull boom.

"They're firing! Firing a cannon!" cried Bob. "The people on one side of the river are shooting at those on the other side! What can be the matter?"

CHAPTER XII

NEW USE FOR AN AIRSHIP

INDEED it did seem as if a miniature battle was in progress, but the people fired at did not appear to be in any fear. There was only a slight movement among them, though the boys and the professor in the airship could plainly see a black object, which they took to be a cannon ball, speeding across the wide, turgid, rushing river. But the projectile fell short, and landed about twenty feet from shore, splashing the water high.

Immediately there was a flash of flame and a puff of smoke from the other side of the stream, and the fire was returned, another black object speeding toward the crowd that had first discharged a cannon.

"It's a regular battle!" cried the professor. "Don't go any lower, boys. They may fire on us!"

But Jerry, Ned and Bob were too interested in the curious fight going on below them, to want

to steer out of the way. The airship was slowed up, and hovered over the queer scene.

"The second projectile fell short, too," remarked Ned, as he saw it splash into the water, twenty-five feet from the western shore. "Why don't they put in more powder if they want 'em to reach across?"

"But why are they firing at each other, anyhow?" questioned Bob, too interested, for the time being, to think of eating. "Two towns can't be at war with one another."

"We'll soon see what it is," said Jerry. "They are getting ready to fire again."

Indeed preparations could be noticed among the group of men surrounding a small brass cannon. But, just as they were loading it several in the crowd uttered cries of astonishment, and pointed upward. Instantly the two throngs on either side of the river seemed to forget their animosity toward one another, and began making excited motions to those in the airship.

"They evidently want us to come down," said Bob.

"Don't you do it," urged the professor. "They only want something else to shoot at. They may elevate their cannon any minute and fire upon us."

"I don't believe so," was Jerry's opinion. "There's something queer going on, and I want to find out what it is."

The people continued to make motions to the boys, as if urging them to land. They were apparently calling out something, but the height at which the *Comet* was precluded the voices being heard distinctly, and Jerry, anxious as he was to learn the cause for the shooting, was not quite ready to descend.

Finally one man on the ground improvised a megaphone out of some newspapers, and pointing it at the airship yelled:

"Come down and help us! The bridge has washed away!"

"The bridge has washed away!" repeated Bob. "Well, what can we do? And why should they fire at one another, unless some one in either crowd cut the bridge loose, and started a fight?"

"The high water probably carried the bridge away," said Jerry. "What we can do for them I don't see. However, we'll go down. Don't you think we might venture, Professor?"

"Well," answered the scientist slowly, "seeing that they have invited us, they will hardly fire on us now. Besides, I might possibly find the flying lizard there. Yes, go down, by all means."

A few minutes later, while the crowds on either side of the stream looked on in wonder, Jerry brought the airship to earth, on the western shore. The craft was immediately surrounded by an excited throng.

"You're just in time!" cried one man, the same one who had used the megaphone. "We've tried everything we could—kites, swimmers, rats, and even the cannon—but nothing seems to do any good."

"What are you trying to do?" asked Jerry, much puzzled, as, indeed, were his chums.

"Get a line across to the other shore, to establish communication," replied the man. "You see, our town and the other one were connected by a bridge. This is Wakedell, on this side, and Eaton on the other side of the river. Lots of our people work in factories in Eaton, but since the bridge washed away, day before yesterday, there is no way of getting across."

"Haven't you got any boats?" asked Ned.

"Yes, we had several, and when the bridge washed down stream we got them out. But the current is so swift, and there are so many rocks in the river that it's dangerous. Besides, if we start a boat on this side, and head it for Eaton, it's likely to bring up a mile down on the other

side, in a patch of lonesome woods. Then several boats upset, and were lost, and we barely saved the people.

"So we decided to try a new plan. We knew if we could get a strong wire cable from shore to shore we could run boats across by means of that, and with little danger, until we got a new bridge built, or until the water went down. You see, there are a lot of people who live here caught on the other side, and we have a lot of Eaton folks here, who want to get home, but can't, as there's no other bridge standing on this river now, within fifty miles; all washed away."

"Can't you get the cable over?" asked Jerry.

"No," replied the man. "As I said, we've tried everything. We tried to get a rope across by flying a kite, but the wind wasn't right. Then we tried tying a light string to a big muskrat, and threw him as far across as we could, thinking he would swim to the other side, but the rat swam right back here. The folks on the other side have tried to get a line to us, but couldn't. One man tried to swim over, but it was too dangerous, and he had to turn back. We even tried a toy balloon, and did manage to get a light cord over. But when we tried to pull over a heavier one, the light cord broke.

"Then we thought of the cannon. We each had one, for Fourth of July celebrations, and we took turns firing. We used pieces of iron for projectiles, and tied cords to them, thinking we could shoot them across the river."

"You don't use enough powder," said Bob.

"Well, we did at first," replied the man. "We put in heavy enough charges, but they blew the cords off the projectiles, and we were as badly off as before. Then we reduced the charge, but the pieces of iron fall short every time. We were about to give up, when we saw your airship. Then I thought of a plan."

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"Could you carry a rope over the river for us?" asked the man eagerly. "If you will, we can soon haul a wire cable across, and fasten it firmly on either shore. Then we can run a big flat-bottom boat back and forth until the bridge is built. That's the only way I see, so folks from Eaton can get here, and so we can get over there. Things are in a bad way. Husbands are separated from their wives, and the factories are short of hands. Will you do it?"

"Of course we will!" cried Jerry heartily. "It's a new use for an airship, but I guess it's a good

one. Get the rope and we'll fly across with it in quick time."

"I hoped you would," spoke the man earnestly. "It was the last chance I saw. Hurrah, folks!" he shouted. "The airship will take a rope across for us. No need to fire the cannon any more," and there was set up a cheer, which was echoed from the throng on the other bank, nearly a mile away, for the people there understood that relief measures were under way.

"Get busy, boys," said Jerry to his chums. "This is a new job for us, but I guess we can do it."

CHAPTER XIII

RUNNING THE CABLE

THE hopelessness of the crowds on both sides of the river had now changed to joyful anticipation. They had seen so many attempts fail to establish communication that they had almost given up. Of course they knew that in time the river would go down, and transit across it in boats would be comparatively easy. But it would still be several days before the waters would subside, it was stated, because the river was fed from many mountain brooks and rivulets, which were much swollen by heavy rains.

"And even if the river does get to its normal level," explained the man with the megaphone, who introduced himself as James Duncan, "even then it's dangerous."

"Why?" inquired Bob.

"Because of a number of rocks, and the rapids which are in this part of the stream. A bridge is the only safe way to cross, and it will be some

time before that can be rebuilt. But the steel cable ferry will be a big help. Are you ready to take it over now?"

"As soon as you are," replied Ned.

"I think we had better carry a rope over first," decided Jerry. "Then your friends on the other side can haul the cable over. If we attempt to carry the heavy wire rope in the airship it may sag, or foul, and do some damage. But we can carry a stout rope across very easily."

"We have the rope right here," explained Mr. Duncan. "Come on, gentlemen," he called to some of his friends. "Get the rope ready. The boys are going to take it across. Then the boat will begin running."

"Hurrah!" cried scores of voices.

Jerry, Ned and Bob now re-entered the airship, and began to prepare for running the cable. They looked to the motors, and set the gas machine in operation, to fully distend the big bag, as they needed all the reserve buoyancy, since the long rope would be a heavy drag.

"Here you are!" called Mr. Duncan, passing up the end of a rope, about an inch in diameter. "Better fasten it well, for a rope a mile long is rather heavy."

Jerry saw that it was securely attached to

strong braces in the after part of the *Comet,* and then he requested Mr. Duncan to see to it that the rope was paid out well from the shore.

"I'll station a man right near it, to see that it does not tangle," promised Mr. Duncan, who seemed to be in general charge of matters. "Here, Mr. Simon," he called to a very stout individual, "you keep near this coil of rope and see that it doesn't snarl. I'm going to get the wire cable ready, and see to the boat."

"Humph! That man might be a cousin to Chunky," observed Ned in a low voice, as he noted the rope custodian.

"Aw, cut it out," pleaded Bob, who was sensitive about his fleshiness.

"Where's the professor?" asked Jerry, suddenly, looking about. "I haven't seen him for five minutes."

The boys looked over the crowd. Most of the people were thronged about the airship, inspecting it, but, off to one side there was a little group, which seemed strangely agitated. Then there came an excited exclamation, and a long handled net was thrust upward.

"There's the professor," observed Bob. "Probably he's capturing a slab-sided mud turtle, or some other queer creature."

"We can come back for him," remarked Ned. "He'll be better satisfied to stay here and catch bugs than come with us while we're running the cable."

"I guess so," agreed Jerry. A few minutes later, as everything was in readiness, the signal to start was given. The anchor ropes that had held down the *Comet* were cast off, and the big craft shot up into the air, dragging the rope after it. Jerry headed it straight across the river, and soon they were directly above the turbulent stream, which boiled and bubbled over the hidden rocks.

"Ned, you watch the rope being paid out," directed Jerry. "I'll steer, and Bob can go to the motor room."

"What shall I do?" asked the stout youth rather dubiously, for Chunky was not very fond of machinery, and a motorcycle or an automobile was about his limit.

"You shut off power when I tell you to," responded Jerry. "Something may happen and then we'll want to stop suddenly."

They were not moving very swiftly for the heavy rope acted as a drag, and besides, Jerry had not turned on full power, as he wanted no accidents to occur. But they crossed the river without accident, pulling over the rope. When a

landing was made on the eastern shore, scores crowded up around the craft, almost overwhelming our heroes with their thanks, and all eager to see the airship.

"Here, never mind looking at that circus machine," called one man, good naturedly. "Let's get busy and pull the wire rope over. I want to see the ferry running. I haven't been home in two days, and I don't know what my wife and children look like," and he laughed, for the first time in many hours, he told the boys.

It was a comparatively easy matter, now that a large rope was stretched across the river, to haul over the wire cable. This was soon made fast to anchorages, and then, to guard against accidents, an additional cable was strung, for fear the first might break. A broad, flat-bottomed boat was in readiness, and it was so arranged that it could be pulled along by means of the cable and a windlass, worked by two men, the craft being prevented from going down stream by the heavy cable.

The ferry was soon in operation, and the boys watched the first boat load of people being transferred. It worked well, and the lads were overwhelmed with thanks. Some persons even offered

them money, but of course our friends would not take it.

"Well, we might as well be on our way again, I suppose," remarked Jerry, after they had watched the boat go back and forth several times.

"We might send telegrams home before we leave," went on Bob, "and let the folks know we have gotten this far in safety. There must be a telegraph office around here."

"It is a good idea," commented Jerry. "Glad you mentioned it, Bob. We'll send word home."

They inquired the location of the telegraph office, and, as it was in the centre of town, Ned and Bob remained with the airship, while Jerry took the dispatches.

The telegraph office was in the railroad station, and while Jerry stood on the platform, chatting with the agent, a freight train rumbled in, and stopped, while the engine got water at a distant tank.

Jerry, having accomplished his errand, was about to turn away, to go back to his chums, when, from the shadows of a freight car that was on a siding, he observed a man run quickly out, and cling to the break-beams of one of the refrigerator cars of the freight.

"Some tramp going to steal a ride," reflected

the lad, but, just then, the gleam from a switch lamp, for it was now getting dusk, fell upon the tramp's face. Jerry started and could hardly repress an exclamation.

"Bill Berry!" he murmured to himself. "Bill Berry, that town good-for-nothing—that crony of Noddy's! What can he be doing here? I wonder if he is following us?" For Bill Berry, as my readers know, had, more than once, been the cause of much trouble to the motor boys.

Bill was now out of sight under the car, well hidden from view. Jerry first thought he would speak to the agent about it, and then he reflected that this would do little good.

"Where is that freight bound for?" he asked, as carelessly as he could.

"That? Oh, that's a through freight for the West," answered the telegraph operator. "It goes right through to California, just as it is. Right across the Rockies."

Jerry could not repress a start.

"Across the Rockies," he thought. "And that's where we're bound! Noddy Nixon has already gone out there, and Bill Berry will probably join him. Then there'll be trouble for us!"

With apprehension in his heart Jerry turned to go back to the airship.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROFESSOR IS MISSING

"WHAT'S the matter, Jerry?" asked Ned, as soon as the tall lad had joined his chums. The lights had been set aglow in the cabin of the airship, and around the craft was gathered a curious throng.

"Why?" replied Jerry. "Does anything look to be the matter?" and he tried to speak lightly.

"You look as if you had seen a ghost," answered Ned.

"Well, I did; sort of one," was Jerry's sober answer. "I saw Bill Berry, and he's worse than a ghost."

"Bill Berry!" exclaimed Ned and Bob in the same breath. "Where?"

"Under a freight car."

"Was he dead?" demanded Bob.

"So that's why you thought him a ghost?" asked Ned.

"No, he wasn't dead," returned Jerry. "He

was very much alive, and he was on the through western freight, on his way to join Noddy and the others of the gang, I suppose. Boys, we'll have to hustle to get ahead of them."

A little later, after warning the throng to stand back, Jerry entered the pilot house, and, lighting the big search lamp, started the motor. The ship arose, and the great propellers began to revolve.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" shouted the people, and they cheered the boys who had been of such service to them.

The lads answered with farewells, and then, with Bob and Ned in the cabin, the former getting ready to cook supper, and Jerry in the pilot house, the *Comet* was sent due west, as straight as the compass indicated.

Bob had just announced that "grub" was ready, and Jerry was about to adjust the automatic steering apparatus, so that he could leave the airship to itself, while he ate, when Ned uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"The professor!" he cried. "Professor Snodgrass! We have left him behind!"

For a moment the three stared blankly at one another. Then the truth dawned upon them. The scientist had resumed his fad of collecting insects as soon as he was out of the airship, and, the ex-

citement of getting the cable across the river, and Jerry's sight of Bill Berry, had driven all thoughts of their friend from their minds.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" gasped Jerry.

"Wouldn't that put mustard on your egg sandwich!" exclaimed Bob.

"What's to be done?" asked Ned, after a pause.

"Done? Why we've got to go back after him, of course," was Jerry's rejoinder. "I wonder if we can find the place in the darkness?"

It was rather a risk, but, fortunately they had not gone far, and the lights of the town they had left were quite brilliant. Then, too, there was no other place near it, save the one across the river, and this was easily distinguished.

Soon they were skimming back, and in a little while they had landed on the outskirts of Wakedell.

"You two had better stay here with the airship, and I'll go in town and see if I can find the professor," said Jerry. "I don't believe I'll have much trouble in locating him."

The tall lad was soon on his way through the principle street of the city. He was at once recognized as one of the boys from the airship, and was cordially greeted.

"The professor—that little bald-headed man?" repeated several, when Jerry had questioned them. "No, we haven't seen him. But then we've been so busy since the ferry started to run, that there's nothing uncommon in that. I say, but you lads did us a good service."

"But what can have become of the professor?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, you'd better see Mr. Duncan," was the advice given. "He's chairman of the board of aldermen, and he knows everything in this burg. See Mr. Duncan."

Jerry sought out the man who had superintended the stringing of the cable.

"The professor?" he repeated. "Well, I think the most likely place to look for him would be at the hotel. There is only one in the place, and, very likely, when he found you had gone off and left him, he went there. We'll go and make inquiries."

"How is the ferry running?" asked Jerry, more to show a polite interest than for any other reason, for he was somewhat worried over many matters, not the least of which was the absence of Mr. Snodgrass.

"Fine!" replied Mr. Duncan. "Couldn't be

better! But here we are at the hotel, where, I have no doubt, you will find your friend."

Jerry, accompanied by Mr. Duncan, entered the corridor. The lad inquired if Professor Snodgrass had put up there.

"You mean a little man, with not much hair on his head," asked the clerk, "who's always looking around as if he'd lost something?"

"That's the gentleman," replied Jerry, with a smile.

"He's in room sixteen. Front!" cried the clerk, and when a bell boy responded, the man back of the desk added: "Show Mr. Duncan and his friend up to sixteen."

As Jerry and Mr. Duncan advanced along the corridor, led by the bell boy, they were met by a chambermaid, who was rushing wildly along.

"What's the matter, Mary?" asked the bell boy.

"Matter? Sure there's a crazy man in number sixteen!" was the answer. "He's beating down the walls! I'm going to tell the boss!" and she disappeared on the run.

Jerry, Mr. Duncan and the bell boy hurried on. As they came in front of room number sixteen they heard a violent pounding on the walls.

Certainly it did seem as if some one was trying to batter his way out.

"That's can't be the professor," remarked Jerry. "He wouldn't act that way."

"Perhaps he has been attacked by a robber!" suggested Mr. Duncan. "Run, my lad, and get help," he added to the bell boy, whose small face contrasted strangely with his large eyes.

Once more there came a violent pounding on the wall, so that the floors seemed to shake.

"If that is the professor, perhaps he has been bitten by one of his snakes, toads or queer insects, and has gone crazy," thought Jerry. Then, as the racket continued, he heard above the noise, a voice calling:

"Come down! Come down off that wall or I'll get a ladder and catch you! Come down, I say!" Then the pounding started again, just as the bell boy returned, with the clerk and several janitors.

"It *is* the professor," murmured Jerry, who did not know what to think. "But he must be in great distress!"

CHAPTER XV

AT THE MINING CAMP

"WHAT's the matter? What's the trouble?" cried the hotel clerk, running up.

"Aw, dere's a guy in dere what's got bats in his belfrey, boss," explained the bell boy, in his choicest slang. "He's a bug-house."

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked the clerk of Jerry.

"If it's Professor Snodgrass, he is," replied the lad, "but I can't imagine what makes him act so," for the pounding on the walls continued.

"Well, we'll soon see!" exclaimed the clerk. "Here, Jim, you and Jack break down that door, and stand ready to grab the lunatic. He'll smash the hotel."

"Wouldn't it be better to see if the door is locked, before smashing it in?" suggested Mr. Duncan. "You may alarm the unfortunate man unnecessarily if you break it down."

"I'll open it," said Jerry, eagerly, and he tried

the knob. It turned readily and Jerry stepped into the room. The others followed timidly but they need have had no fears. For, no sooner had Jerry stepped over the threshold than the professor, for it was the scientist in the room, cried out:

"Oh, Jerry, I'm so glad you've come. Help me to get him! I can't reach him!"

"What is it?" asked the lad, looking about, and noting that nothing in the room had been disturbed, in spite of the terrific racket.

"It's a new kind of water bug," explained the professor. "One with red stripes down his back. I must get the specimen, but it is so high up on the wall that I can't reach it, even by standing on a chair. I tried to jar it down, by pounding on the walls, but the little beauty is still there. See, there he is!" and Mr. Snodgrass pointed to a curious insect high upon the wall.

"Was that what made the pounding?" demanded the hotel clerk, evidently much chagrined.

"It was, my dear sir," replied the professor calmly. "I knocked as softly as I could, yet I felt I must have that bug. It is worth a hundred dollars at least."

"Say, the hotel's full of 'em," murmured the bell boy. "I'll catch you a dozen for a quarter."

"Ah, but they have no red stripes down their backs," declared the scientist. "Help me get this one, Jerry."

Jerry said little. In fact there was not much he could say. The professor gazed calmly at the crowd that had entered his room. Then he inquired mildly:

"Has there been a fire, or anything like that?"

"No, only a little excitement," responded Mr. Duncan, trying not to smile. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, of course. Why shouldn't I be?"

"I didn't know," murmured Mr. Duncan, turning aside.

Jerry got on a chair, and, being tall, soon had the red-striped water bug, which the professor carefully put in his specimen box. Then, as the janitors, clerk, bell boy and chambermaid withdrew, the professor remarked:

"When I left the airship I saw a rare specimen of a Buffalo bug-moth on a lady in the crowd. I captured that and then I saw several other valuable specimens. I was so busy making a collection, for this is a wonderful town for bugs, that, before I knew it, night had fallen. I inquired my way to the hotel, and I knew you would find me as soon as the cable was strung. Isn't it nearly done, Jerry?"

"It's all finished," replied the lad. "We had started off without you, when we suddenly remembered that you were not with us, and we came back. Then the chambermaid said——"

Jerry paused, somewhat embarrassed.

"Yes, what did she say?" asked the professor, innocently. "Did she know of any more of these bugs?"

"I guess not," finished Jerry. "But I came back to get you, professor." He did not mention the alarm the scientist had innocently caused.

"Oh, you needn't have been in any hurry. I was enjoying myself here. I never saw so many rare bugs in one town before, in all my life."

"Well, are you ready to go on with us?" inquired the tall lad.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. I must soon begin to search for my flying lizard amid the mountains. Yes, I am ready to go."

Looking carefully to see that he still had the red-striped water bug, the professor gathered up his belongings, and, after paying his small hotel bill, left with Jerry.

Once more they started off, and all that night the Comet made good time, skimming along just beneath the clouds. The next two days were devoid of incident, and they covered a number of

miles. Occasionally, in the next week, they descended to replenish their supply of gasolene and oil, or to buy fresh provisions. The ship was behaving admirably, and they expected, in about three days more, to reach their destination. They had telegraphed Jim Nestor, the veteran miner, that they would soon be with him.

They reached the first range of the Rockies late one afternoon, and that night began their flight across them.

"Just think of it, boys," announced Jerry. "We'll soon be over Pike's Peak!"

"If nothing happens," remarked Bob.

They recalled the remark of the stout lad the next day, when, as they were sailing along over a high range, there came a sudden snap, and one of the planes that had been damaged when Noddy had run away with the car, broke.

Instantly the *Comet* began to fall, since the gas bag was not filled to the usual capacity.

"We're going down!" yelled Ned.

"Keep cool," advised Jerry, as he shut off the power. "I think I can glide down safely."

"Shan't I start the gas machine?" yelled Bob.

"Yes," replied Jerry. "Maybe we can make enough to bear us up before we hit anything solid."

But the vapor could not be generated fast enough to do any good, and it looked as if the *Comet* was going to strike the earth with force enough to demolish it. Jerry, however, kept his head, and, by the skillful use of the deflecting rudder he threw up the head of the craft so that, striking a heavy strata of air, the ship slid down on it, like a sled upon the ice. The craft came to the ground with considerable force, but the improved springs in the starting wheels took up most of the shock, and the boys suffered no more than a severe jolt.

"Well, we came down out of that fairly well," remarked Jerry, with a sigh of relief. "Now we'll see if we can fix things."

"Guess we'd better wait until morning," suggested Ned, after a glance at the broken plane. "We'll have to cut a new frame for it."

Jerry agreed with this, and, after tying the craft securely, to prevent it being blown away during a high wind, the boys prepared to spend the night on top of one of the higher ranges of the Rockies. They were undisturbed, save for the far-off howls of some big mountain lions.

They set to work in the morning, and, by dint of hard work, had the repairs made by noon. Then, at Ned's earnest request they did go on a

mountain lion hunt. But the lions seemed to prefer darkness to daylight, and the only one seen was a small specimen, which Ned killed after three shots. He wanted to save the skin of it, but his chums persuaded him that he could get larger and better specimens where they were going. As usual, the professor began a search for insects as soon as the landing was made, and he kept it up until they were ready to start.

"But I didn't get my flying lizard," he complained. "Still, I have hopes."

They started again, early the next morning, and Jerry set the motor at a good speed to make up for lost time. Toward evening, of the second day, when they had crossed the extreme end of a range known as the Magollon Mountains, and were sailing over a wide valley, Bob suddenly called out:

"Doesn't that place look familiar, down there?" He pointed to a small settlement. Jerry seized the telescope from his chum, and applied it to his eye.

"It does!" he announced excitedly. "That's the settlement near our mine. We ought to sight our diggings in a few minutes."

"Go lower down," advised Ned.

Jerry shifted the deflecting rudder, and, a mo-

ment later, the *Comet* was nearing the earth. There could now be observed numbers of miners running about, and pointing upward. Nearer and nearer to the earth came the airship. Then Ned cried:

"There it is! There's the place. I see the hut we used to live in, when we opened the mine! Hurrah! We're here at last, fellows!"

"And ready to solve the mystery of the valley," added Jerry in a low voice.

"There's some one waving at you," remarked the professor, pointing to a man who was vigorously swinging his hat.

"Jim! It's old Jim Nestor!" cried Bob, who had good eyes. "Jim is waiting for us!"

Down glided the airship. She was at the end of the first part of her trip. But a harder voyage was yet ahead of her and the boys.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MINER'S STORY

"WELL, you got here at last, did you?" called Jim Nestor, as he came forward to greet the boys and the professor as they alighted from the airship. "We've been sort of sightin' for ye the last few hours. I calculated you'd be along about now, but Sledge Hammer Tod, here, he allowed as how you wouldn't show up for a week, and maybe not at all, for he don't believe in airships; do you, Tod?" and Jim looked at an old miner who shuffled up with him.

"Never havin' seen one, I put 'em in the same class with Santa Claus," answered the miner. "But I believe in 'em now."

He glanced with wondering eyes at the big airship, which had settled down on a level spot in front of the group of buildings that were around the shaft of the boys' gold mine.

"Boys, let me introduce to you my friend, Mr. Embury Tod—Sledge Hammer Tod, I call him, for he hammers away at things, and there isn't a

better miner going. Tod, these are the boys I was telling you of."

"Pleased to meet you," spoke the old miner, with a friendly nod. "And so that's the airship, eh?"

"Airship or motor ship, as we sometimes call it," replied Jerry. "We came all the way from the East in it."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Sledge Hammer Tod. "That's going some."

"Have you seen anything of Noddy Nixon or his gang?" asked Ned.

"No, and I don't want to," replied Jim Nestor. "I received your letters and telegrams, saying he might make trouble, but he hasn't showed up here yet, but when he does, why, Tod and I are ready for him, aren't we, Sledge Hammer?"

"That's what," and the old miner, who was several years the senior of Nestor, clenched a brawny fist.

"Tod's my new foreman," went on Jim. "The work got so heavy I had to have help."

"Then the mine's doing well?" inquired Jerry.

"Couldn't be better."

Jerry's face showed the relief he felt. "Well, what kind of a trip did you have?" went on Nestor. "Land sakes, I never see such boys!

First you come all the way out here in an auto, and locate a mine I thought was as good as gone. Then you come in an airship. Next I s'pose you'll be growing wings, and flying without any apparatus whatever."

"Hardly, yet awhile," commented Jerry, who then went into detail about the trip, telling of Noddy's theft of the airship, and how they had stopped on their way to carry the cable across the river.

"But the funny part of it was," went on Jerry, "that when Noddy stole our airship, we have every reason to believe that there was with him an old man, who you will remember, Jim. He was Jackson——"

At that moment Professor Snodgrass fairly jumped toward Tod.

"Excuse me!" exclaimed the scientist. "Don't move an inch, I beg of you! It's very important. Don't stir!"

"If it's a rattlesnake, jest stomp on its head," said the miner, coolly. "I'm not afraid of 'em. Where is it?" and he prepared to turn around.

"Quiet! Quiet!" begged the little bald-headed man. "I will have it in a second," and he made a dive for the miner's boot. "There!" exclaimed the professor, "I have it!"

He arose, holding something tightly in his hand, and he quickly transferred it to his green specimen box, at the same time remarking:

"That certainly was a beauty; worth at least fifty dollars at the lowest calculation!"

The old miner looked at the professor, and then at the boys. Then he pointed significantly to his head. The scientist did not see him.

"What did you capture that time?" asked Bob.

"A rare specimen of a jumping fly," was the answer. "It is the first one I have ever seen," and the scientist began to jot down in his book some notes concerning it.

"He isn't crazy, Sledge Hammer," declared Jim Nestor, in a whisper, for he knew what his foreman thought. "He jest collects bugs, that's all," and, while Professor Snodgrass moved off to one side, to look for more jumping flies, the boys explained the fad of their friend.

"But you started to say something about a Mr. Jackson," remarked Jim Nestor, to Jerry.

"Not Mr. Jackson, but Jackson Bell, the old hermit," was the answer, and Jerry proceeded to explain as much of the mystery as he knew; how he believed that Mr. Bell had come East to get

aid in rescuing some of his friends from a mysterious valley, how he had been deceived by Noddy, taken in the airship, and how he disappeared, leaving the fragments of a letter behind him.

"I wish we could find him," went on Jerry, "and aid his friends. But, after thinkin' it all over, I am sometimes inclined to believe that Mr. Bell's mind may have become weakened, and that he imagined all that about his friends being in danger in some valley."

"Very likely," assented Nestor. "I guess there's not much stock to be taken in it."

"Yes, there is!" suddenly exclaimed the old miner.

"Is what?" asked Nestor.

"Stock to be taken in that story," answered Tod. "I don't know this Mr. Jackson Bell, but I do happen to know that somewhere in the Rocky Mountains is a mysterious valley, where there is supposed to be a party of whites—men, women and children—who have been lost for years."

"You know something like that, and never told me?" asked Nestor, somewhat reproachfully.

"Well, you never asked me," went on Tod, "and, for that matter, the story is an old one."

"Tell it to us," begged Jerry, eagerly, believing that they had unexpectedly gotten on the track of the mystery.

"Well, there isn't much to tell, or, rather, I don't know an awful lot about it," resumed Tod. "It happened a number of years ago. A party of Easterners who got tired of the life in cities decided to come out West. They heard of a place where some good gold claims could be had, nothing remarkable, you know, but sufficient to attract them. They planned to come together, take up claims, build a little settlement and live there the rest of their lives.

"Well, they started out, and they got to the mountains. Men I've known, who have been prospecting since forty-nine remember to have met the party on their travels. As I said, they had nearly reached their diggings when they suddenly disappeared."

"Where to?" asked Bob, who, like his companions, was greatly interested.

"That's the mystery of it," answered Tod. "No one knew where they went to. The last seen of them was that they were being led up into the Uncompahgre mountains in Colorado, and an Indian was their guide. Some old prospectors seen 'em, and they thought it was rather risky for

to trust an Indian, but they didn't say nothin', for folks out here get in the habit of mindin' their own business. Anyway, that was the last seen of the party of white folks. As I said, there were men, women and children, though the children must be growed up now."

"How many of them were there?" asked Bob softly.

"About two score, I reckon, though if they're alive now I don't s'pose there's so many, for some must have died, as they were old men. Anyhow that's the story of the missing party. They were called the 'Deering Band,' as they were led by a man named Deering. I don't s'pose they will ever be located, but it's true, what your friend Jackson Bell intimated, that there is a mystery about them. Though how Bell came to know of them, and why he started to rescue them is more than I can figure. But Deering and his crowd seem to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Maybe the Indians killed them all."

"That's what we always thought," spoke a voice at the side of Sledge Hammer Tod. It came so suddenly that everyone gave a start, until it was seen that it was Professor Snodgrass who had made the remark.

"Do you know the story of the missing Deering

Band?" asked Jerry. "We did not speak to you about this mystery, Professor, as we did not want to take your mind off your work."

"Know about it? Of course, I know about it," was the unexpected reply. "Amos Deering, the leader, was my cousin!"

CHAPTER XVII

NODDY NIXON ARRIVES

THE unexpected announcement of Professor Snodgrass came as a startling confirmation to the story told by the old miner. The scientist, having finished making an entry in his note-book, had come up, and listened to the recital. All eyes were now turned on him.

"Was Amos Deering your cousin?" asked Sledge Hammer Tod, thinking he might not have heard aright; then, too, he was not quite satisfied as to the perfect sanity of the bald-headed man.

"He was," replied the scientist. "Amos was always fond of a roving life, and when he heard of a place out West where he could take up some gold claims, he organized a party to go with him. It was in the year that I discovered a five-legged frog, and wrote a book about it. Amos wanted me to go with the party, saying I could find many specimens if I did not want to hunt for gold. But I declined. However, he and a number of venturesome persons went. We waited in vain for

some news, and at last it came. It was to the effect that the entire party had been led off into the mountains by the Indians, and killed. Poor Amos, to think I should meet somebody out here who knew of him!"

"Well, it's true that the party was led off to the mountains, and by the Indians," said Tod, "but it's not altogether so sure that they were killed. Maybe some are living yet, though where they are is a mystery."

"From the clews left by Mr. Bell, it would seem that they are alive," suggested Jerry. "Mr. Bell practically says the party is alive, and in his letter to his son, the torn parts of which epistle I found in the airship, he says he is about to go to their rescue. They are in some sort of a valley, I take it, hard to get at. That's why Mr. Bell thought of an airship, and why he started to find us, but, instead, met with Noddy Nixon. Now, the question is, can we find that valley?"

Sledge Hammer Tod shook his head doubtfully.

"Lost Valley it's called," he said. "Many have tried to find it, but have failed—miners of experience—for there is a rumor that gold is plentiful in it. And, not only is it hard to find, but there is danger from the Indians."

"I thought all the Indians were on Government reservations," commented Bob.

"Not all," answered Tod. "Some broke away, and are still in the Colorado mountains, I believe. Perhaps the remnant of this tribe is in possession of Lost Valley. Anyhow, I don't believe it would be safe to look for it, even if it was possible to find it, which I doubt."

"My poor cousin," said Professor Snodgrass, sadly. "I had given him up for dead, but now, to hear that there is a possibility of him being alive, makes me wish I could help rescue him."

"And you can!" exclaimed Jerry quickly.

"How?" asked the scientist eagerly. "Do you mean that you are going to try to find Lost Valley?"

"I certainly am," declared Jerry, firmly. "That is one reason why I came West in the *Comet*. I wanted to protect our mine, but, now that we are on hand before Noddy's gang has arrived, I don't believe there is much danger on that score. We can devote most of our time to finding the mysterious valley, and, once we locate it, we will rescue any who are left of the missing Deering Band. We will search for the valley in the airship!"

"You'll never find it!" predicted Tod, with a dubious shake of his head.

"Say, you don't know these motor boys," spoke Jim Nestor, admiringly. "Once they set out to do a thing they generally finish it. I wouldn't want to gamble that they couldn't find that valley, Tod."

"Well, they may stumble on it, if they hunt long enough, but the Indians will never let them get into it."

"We'll see," declared Jerry, smiling grimly. "Anyhow, we won't give up until we get there. If we can rescue those who are left it's worth fighting the Indians to accomplish."

"That's right, and I'm with you!" cried Jim Nestor.

"And you can count on me, when it comes to a fight!" added Sledge Hammer Tod with energy.

The whole party now began an engrossing discussion of the missing Amos Deering and his friends. Tod told such other details as occurred to him, and Professor Snodgrass was so interested that he forgot to hunt for bugs.

"But what I can't understand," said Ned, "is what has become of Mr. Bell? Why did he disappear so mysteriously?"

"I think I can explain that," replied Jerry. "He probably learned, soon after starting with Noddy, that Jack and the bully were not the owners of the airship. Mr. Bell probably left in a hurry, either before or just after the accident. He may have imagined that we had sold the airship to Noddy, and despairing of help in that direction he may have come back west here."

"In that case we'll see him," suggested Bob.

"Perhaps. But the thing for us to do is to get ready to hunt for that valley. As soon as we have rested up, and given our craft an overhauling, we'll start for the place."

The airship was made secure against storms, and then our three heroes and Professor Snodgrass proceeded to make themselves comfortable in one of the several cabins at the mine. Bob's desire for food was gratified, the Chinese cook soon serving an excellent meal.

The next two days were spent in going over the airship, and in arranging for supplies and provisions for the long tour. Mr. Tod went off on a little trip, to see an old miner, and make some inquiries regarding Lost Valley. He came back the third day after the arrival of the boys, but the information he secured was not much more definite than that which he already possessed.

"We'll just have to prospect for that valley," he said.

"We," repeated Jim Nestor. "Are you going along, Tod?"

"Wa'al, I calalated that if the airship would hold me I'd like to go. I ain't fit any Indians for a long time, and I'd sort of like the sensation."

"Oh, the airship will carry a large party, though we have not sleeping accommodations for many," said Jerry. "That is, if we should happen to rescue the people of the valley."

"Oh, I guess you can make out," answered Tod. "But I say, Jim, you ain't got any objections to my goin'; have you?"

"Not a bit. Glad to have you go with the boys. I'll have to stay here and look after the mine, although I guess Noddy and his gang have about given up trying to get it."

How mistaken Jim was he found out three days later. It was toward the close of the afternoon, when he, with the three boys, was sitting near the mouth of the shaft. Professor Snodgrass, as usual, was out collecting specimens.

Up the road that led from Rockyford, the nearest town to the gold diggings, came four figures. The motor boys and Jim Nestor looked up as they saw them.

"Hello! Something's doing," announced Jim, with a snapping shut of his jaws. "There's Mike Malone, one of the deputy sheriffs. Wonder what he wants?"

But the interest of them all was centred more in the three figures that followed the deputy. For they were none others than Noddy Nixon, Bill Berry and Tom Dalsett. They came on with a confident air.

"Howdy," called Malone to the miner, as soon as he was within hailing distance.

"Howdy," answered Jim. "What's up?"

Then, before the deputy sheriff could answer, Noddy Nixon broke in with:

"We've come to take possession of our mine! You fellows have had it long enough. We're going to clear you all out, and get the gold ourselves. I told you I'd get ahead of you, Jerry Hopkins!" and Noddy sneered at the three motor boys, while Tom Dalsett and Bill Berry grinned maliciously.

CHAPTER XVIII

OFF FOR LOST VALLEY

JIM NESTOR leaped to his feet, and, with a characteristic motion, his hand sought the revolver he always wore, but which he seldom used, for Jim was a very peaceable man. Then, as if regretting that he had been betrayed into action by the taunt of a bully like Noddy, Jim sat down again, and, looking at the deputy sheriff, asked:

"Did you want to see me, Mike?"

"Yes, that's what I came here for," was the answer, "and if some people would mind their own business, and let me attend to mine we'd get along better," continued Malone, as he gave Noddy a sharp glance.

Jerry looked as if he was going to step forward and engage in a wordy if not a fistic encounter with Noddy, but in a low voice Jim Nestor bade him keep cool.

"Leave it to Malone," said the superintendent of the gold mine. "He and I are friends. We'll soon see what's in this."

Malone turned to Noddy, Bill Berry and Tom Dalsett.

"You fellows stay back here until I tell you to come on," he ordered.

"But it's our mine now," insisted Noddy. "We have a right——"

"You do as I tell you, or I'll go back to town, and you can fight your own battle without the aid of the courts," interrupted Mike. Noddy gave one look at Jim and Tod, with the three motor boys standing in back of them. Then, coming from the mine, for their day's work was over, could be seen a number of sturdy men. The force was too big for the one Noddy had, and he wisely agreed to keep back. Mike Malone came on alone, and handed Jim Nestor a paper.

"I'm sorry to do this," he said, "but business is business, and I'm directed by the court to serve this on you."

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"It's some legal document in a suit over this mine. It appears that Nixon and some others lay claim to it."

"But we own it!" cried Jerry. "Once before Noddy Nixon disputed our title, but the courts held that we had the sole rights to it."

"I don't know anything about that," replied

Malone. "All I know is that there's another suit on, and that I have to serve them papers on you. Nixon and them other two fellows got an order from the court this morning."

"Yes, and we're going to take the mine!" exclaimed Noddy. "You fellows had better clear out. We're in possession."

"You dry up!" commanded the deputy sheriff. "If I hear another word out of you, I'll spank you—little whipper-snapper that you are!"

"We want our rights," growled Bill Berry.

"If you had what was coming to you, there'd be a striped suit on you, instead of the one you're wearing," declared Jerry, and Bill only scowled. He knew how true this was.

"What does it all mean?" asked Jim Nestor, as he looked over the paper. "I can't make head or tail out of these law terms."

"It means that you can't work the mine any more until the dispute is decided," said the deputy. "It seems that there is a defect in the title, and the statute of limitations is somehow involved. These people—Noddy Nixon and his crowd—learned of it, they bought the rights of a man who used to own some shares in it, before the mine was a paying proposition, and now they are suing you under that claim for their share."

"But I thought that was all settled," remarked Jerry, for once before Noddy and his cronies had tried the same kind of a game.

"It was, in a way, and yet it wasn't," answered Malone. "There are so many loopholes in the law that these fellows have found one, and are sort of firing on you through it. So you lose possession for a while."

"Too bad, just as we uncovered a rich vein," sighed Jim.

"Oh, we'll work it all right," sneered Tom Dalsett, who had gradually drawn nearer.

"No, you won't!" cried Mike Malone quickly. "Don't you fool yourself. This mine, from now on, is in possession of the Supreme Court of Arizona, and I'm its representative. Nobody can take an ounce of gold from these workings until this dispute is settled forever."

"Do you mean that we can't work our mine?" cried Noddy.

"I don't know that it's your mine," was the reply from the deputy, "but I do mean that you can't set foot inside it. Are all the men out?" he asked of Jim, who nodded. "Then," went on the court official, "I hereby formally and in the name of the court take possession of these diggings, to remain in my possession until dis-

solved by an order from the court, all accordin' to the statutes in such cases made and provided! There, I'm glad I got rid of that! I learned it by heart, but I was afraid I'd forget it. Now I'll seal up the mine, with the official seal, and any man who breaks it or enters the mine will render himself in contempt of court, and liable to a fine or imprisonment, or both, at the discretion of the judge, which is the way the law books have it."

Having thus cleared his mind, Malone proceeded to affix lead seals to the rude wooden door that closed the mouth of the shaft.

"Does that mean we can't go in?" asked Jerry.

"It does, but it also means that they can't go in, either," and Malone nodded toward Dalsett and the others. "I'm in possession, and I intend to remain. You haven't got a pipeful of tobacco you could spare, have you, Jim?"

Nestor handed over a plug, from which the deputy sheriff proceeded to shave some into his hand.

"Do you mean to say we can't have possession of our mine?" cried Noddy, as Malone took his seat on a bench in front of the shaft opening.

"That's what I mean, bub, but I wouldn't get

excited over it. It's too warm. You can go back to town and cool off."

"This means that we all have a vacation, doesn't it?" asked Nestor.

"Something like that," answered the official. "Nothing doing until the courts decide who are the real owners."

"Well, that satisfies me," declared Jim. "We've all been working pretty hard lately, and I don't mind a rest. Men," he went on, turning to the miners, "I'll pay you off, and notify you when I want you again. The mine is closed up."

The miners did not seem to mind it much, for they had made considerable money lately, and had not had a chance to spend it. They hurried to change their clothes, for a vacation in town. As for Jerry and his chums, once they understood that Noddy had no special advantage over them, and that the court would rule on the question, they were not much alarmed. They did not like their old enemy to gain even this advantage over them, but it could not be helped, and they had no fear but that they would ultimately be declared the real owners of the mine. Meanwhile, no harm would result, as no gold could be taken from it. At first Noddy and his two cronies seemed about to make a determined effort to

take physical possession of the diggings, but when they understood that the deputy sheriff meant what he said, and realized that Jim, Tod, and the three boys would be more than a match for them physically, they decided to withdraw.

They went down the road they had come, casting malevolent glances at our heroes; but Jerry, Ned and Bob did not mind these.

"Well, I'm glad that job's over," announced Malone, as he saw Noddy disappear. "I didn't want to serve any papers for those scoundrels, for I believe that's what they are. I couldn't help it, however. I think there was crooked work somewhere, to enable them to get even the claim they say they have, but the court will soon settle it. Meanwhile, you gentlemen can do as you like around here. It's only the mine that is sealed. You can start another if you like, and, of course, you are still in possession of the buildings, bunk houses and the like. In fact, I hope you'll remain, for it's going to be a mighty lonesome job for me to stay here on guard all the while, alone."

"Yes, I guess we'll stay," said Jim. "There's lots of thngs I've been wanting to do, but I haven't had a chance. I want to go hunting mountain lions, but I didn't feel like leaving

when we were taking out so much gold. Now that I can't get at it, I'll take a vacation."

"Well, I don't know as I blame you," agreed Malone.

"Say, this is just the thing for you!" suddenly exclaimed Sledge Hammer Tod. "It's a lucky thing this happened."

"I don't see that," remarked Jim. "How do you figure it out?"

"Why, you can go with the boys and me in the airship to hunt for Lost Valley," replied the old miner. "It's just the chance for you. Between us we ought to be able to locate the place, and rescue the Deering crowd."

Jim thought deeply for a few minutes. Then, slapping his leg with a noise like a pistol shot, he announced:

"By cracky! I believe you're right. I *will* go with you. That is, if that airship shebang is safe," he added cautiously.

"We came all the way in it," answered Bob.

"Then I'll go," decided Jim. "The mine will be safe with Malone in charge, and I'll not worry. When can we start?"

"In a few days," replied Jerry. "I'm glad you can go along, Jim, for we may need your help."

"Well, let's get grub, and talk it all over,"

proposed Bob, hurrying over to the cook's shack in order to escape any comments of his chums. But they were too interested in the recent developments to jibe him.

"Why didn't you ask Noddy why he stole our airship, and what became of Mr. Bell?" suggested Ned to Jerry.

"I didn't think of it until he started back," was the reply. "His claiming our mine again sort of knocked my ideas into a cocked hat. But when I did think of it I decided it was best to keep still. We'll fool Noddy that way. If we begin to question him he may find out that we're going to make a try to rescue Mr. Bell's friends, and spoil our plans. But it certainly is queer what has become of the former hermit, and I would like to know how he found out about the people in Lost Valley. If we had Mr. Bell with us now, he could pilot us right to the place."

"Maybe his son knows."

"Probably, but we can't find his son. The last I heard of Tommy Bell he was many miles from here, and it would be hard to locate him. No, I guess it's just as well we didn't say anything to Noddy, though some day I'll get even with him. We'll go off on our own hook now, and locate that valley."

Preparations for the trip were hurried during the next few days.

Meanwhile, Noddy and his cronies made an unsuccessful attempt to get a modified order from the court, allowing them to work the mine; but they were defeated, and Mike Malone remained in possession. With him on guard, the motor boys and their friends had little to fear.

At last all was in readiness, and one morning, the airship having been thoroughly gone over, the supplies and food put on board, and everything made taut and trim, was ready for the start.

"All aboard!" called Jerry. "Come on, Professor," for the scientist was racing after a new kind of butterfly.

"In a moment," he answered, as, with a sweep of his net, he imprisoned the insect. Then he hurried into the cabin of the *Comet*.

Jerry started the motor, and the big airship arose with a rush, while Malone, on guard at the mine, sent a cheer after the adventurers.

"Good luck!" he called.

Would they find the mysterious valley and rescue the missing party, or would they themselves fall a prey to the Indians? It was a question no one could answer.

CHAPTER XIX

WRECKED ON THE DESERT

THOUGH it was an exceedingly novel experience for both Jim Nestor and Sledge Hammer Tod to ride in an airship, one would never have guessed it from their manner. They were as calm and collected as though that was their usual means of locomotion.

Tod looked down at the earth, which was fast receeding, and in a low voice remarked to Jim Nestor:

"There sits the deputy sheriff on guard."

"Yes," added Jim, equally calm, "as long as he stays there things will be all right. Nixon and his gang won't get much gold out of that mine."

"How do you allow that the gang had the nerve to make a try for your mine?" asked Tod, turning to Ned and Bob.

"Oh, Tom Dalsett planned it," replied Ned. "He has been in the West for some time now,

and probably thought he saw a chance to make some money. He wrote to Noddy to come out here, as Jerry told you, and we found the letter when he ran away. How Noddy managed to get West after he ran away from our airship we can only guess. Anyhow, he did get here, and met Dalsett. Then Bill Berry arrived, probably on some freight train like one Jerry saw him board. Very likely he dropped off at a junction point, and came to Rockyford on a local. Then the three went to court and made their claim."

Jerry came from the pilot house, having fixed the rudder stationary, after ascending to about five hundred feet.

"Well," inquired the tall lad, as he looked at the old miner and at Jim Nestor, "how do you like it? Is it what you thought it would be?" He rather expected to see more of astonishment depicted on the faces of his friends.

"Well, it is and it isn't," was the somewhat enigmatical answer of Jim.

"It might be different," added Tod, as carelessly as he could. "If it doesn't act like a bucking bronco now and throw us off, it will be all right. Something of a distance to fall," he went on casually, as he looked down to the earth.

"Well, since we've made a good start, sup-

pose we plan a little about what we are going to do," went on Jerry. "We will have to depend on you and Mr. Tod, Jim, to find the valley."

"We'll do our best. Have you got grub for a long prospect?"

"We can fly around in the upper air for two weeks if need be," answered the tall lad, for he had seen to it that an unusual supply of fuel and other needful articles had been placed in the ship.

"Well, we ought to find it in that time," said Tod. "I think, if we cruise back and forth along the Uncompahgre Mountain range, we may see just what we are looking for. Of course, it's going to take some time, but we've got to expect that. If we could only meet Mr. Bell now, we wouldn't have any trouble."

"I certainly hope we shall be able to rescue these poor people," put in Professor Snodgrass, looking up from his notebook. "I would very much like to see my cousin again. Just think of being held captive by the Indians all these years!"

"If they only *are* captives," remarked Jim Nestor.

"What do you mean?" asked Ned quickly, detecting a strange note in the man's words.

"Well, I mean if they're still alive," went on

the mine superintendent. "If they are, I think we can dispose of the Indians all right."

They fell to talking of the strange quest on which they had started, the airship, meanwhile, continuing to fly ahead toward the unknown goal. Jerry went back to the pilot house and adjusted the deflection rudder to send the *Comet* higher up, so that a better view of the surrounding country could be had. Still, there was no hope yet of observing the mysterious valley, or even the mountain range in which it was supposed to be located. They were several hundred miles away.

For two days they flew on, not making very rapid time, as Jerry and the boys decided it would be best to be sparing of their fuel, since they were in a region where gasolene was not plentiful. They sailed now high and now low, and every minute a new view could be had of the earth, the mountains and valleys below them.

Professor Snodgrass was kept busy catching and classifying many insects, but, though he kept a diligent lookout, he had not yet seen any winged lizards.

"I guess we're flying too high for them," observed Jim Nestor, who took a curious interest in the fad of the naturalist. "When we get to

that mysterious valley we may find some. I'll help you hunt."

"Will you, really?" asked the delighted professor, for he did not often find a kindred spirit.

They ate and slept in the airship almost with as much ease and comfort as they could have done on earth, and Tod and Nestor were soon at home above the clouds. Bob constituted himself the cook, as probably you have already guessed, and he would have served five meals a day if allowed.

"Well, we're getting there," announced Jerry, on the afternoon of the third day, as the airship was traveling over a wide desert valley. "We could go faster, but there's no need. We'll soon be in Colorado, and over that mountain range; then——"

He was interrupted by a sudden move on the part of Professor Snodgrass. The scientist, who had been seated on a bench in the main cabin of the *Comet,* poring over a book, jumped up, grabbed a long-handled butterfly net, and rushed aft, exclaiming:

"There! I just saw it! The flying lizard. Look out, everybody! I must have it! The first specimen I've ever seen!"

Through the engine room he rushed to get to

the after deck of the craft. The boys saw a small insect winging its way past the airship, but whether it was a flying lizard or not was impossible to say.

"I must have it! I must have it!" cried the professor.

As he rushed through the engine room, the long handle of his net knocked from a shelf a large monkey wrench. It fell against one of the cylinders of the motor and rebounded into the large flywheel. The wheel tossed it back against the cylinder with great force. There was a sound of breaking metal, a loud explosion, and the engine suddenly stopped.

"Oh, dear!" cried the professor, as he paused in his hasty flight. "What have I done?"

From the pilot house Jerry came on the run. He quickly shut off the gasolene, which was flooding the now stationary engine. Then, as he saw the extent of the damage the scientist had unwittingly caused, the lad pulled a lever. There was a hissing sound, and the airship began to settle.

"What's the matter?" cried Jim Nestor. "We're falling down to the desert!" and he looked at the vast stretch of sand below them.

"Has the ship busted?" asked Sledge Hammer Tod.

"Part of the motor is," replied Jerry quietly. "I am letting some of the gas out of the bag, so that we will go down. We will have to descend to earth to repair the engine—if, indeed, we can fix it. The break is a bad one," and he looked grave.

"It's all my fault," wailed the professor. "I should not have been in such a hurry. I knocked the wrench down, and the flying lizard got away, after all."

Amid an ominous silence the *Comet,* badly damaged, settled to the sands, her first stop since leaving the mine.

CHAPTER XX

A LION IN POSSESSION

THE crippled craft of the air settled down gently on the hot sands, skillfully guided by Jerry. As soon as it was stationary, for it needed no guy ropes to hold it, since most of the gas was out of the bag, the travelers climbed from the cabin to the surface of the desert.

"Whew, but it's hot!" exclaimed Bob. "I wouldn't mind an ice cream cone just now."

"Dry up, Chunky," advised Ned, puckering up his lips.

"That's what we'll all do if we stay here long enough," replied the stout lad. "Whew! I'm going to take off some of my clothes."

"Yes, and you and I'd better do the same, Ned," added Jerry. "We'll have to get on our overalls and see if we can fix the engine."

"Is it badly smashed?" inquired Ned.

"I'm afraid it is. Two of the cylinders seem to be cracked," replied Jerry, who had made a hasty examination.

"I'm so sorry," put in Professor Snodgrass. "I didn't mean to do it."

"Oh, it was an accident," replied Jerry pleasantly. "It's partly my fault, for I should not have left the monkey wrench on the shelf where it was likely to get knocked off. But perhaps we can make repairs."

"If you can't, we'll be in a bad way," declared Jim Nestor in a low voice to Jerry.

"Why so?" asked the tall lad.

"Because this is a big desert, and there's no water on it. Unless you've got plenty to last until you can start again, there's liable to be trouble."

"We have plenty, I think," replied Jerry. "We'll get right to work on the engine."

He was interrupted by a cry from Bob, who was on the other side of the airship.

"What's the matter, Chunky?" called Ned.

"I've found a spring of water," answered the stout youth. "Let's get a drink."

Jerry hurried to where his two chums were. There on the sands of the desert was a damp place, as if water was present. It needed but a glance from Jerry's quick eyes, however, to cause him to hurry back into the airship.

"It's a leak in one of our water tanks!" he

cried. "That is no spring! Hurry, here, fellows, and help me to transfer this water! Lively now!"

He did not speak of the vital need of saving every drop of the precious fluid, but Ned and Bob must have guessed, for they worked quickly, and the water from the leaking tank, in which a hole had been punched by a piece of one of the broken cylinders, was emptied into another receptacle. But several gallons had leaked away, and Jerry looked more serious than before.

"I wish I could do something to make up for my carelessness," suggested the scientist. "But I fear my knowledge of machinery——"

"That's all right, Mr. Snodgrass," replied Jerry. "We will be able to get the engine in shape, I think. I'll cut out the two broken cylinders, and run on eight," for the motor was a ten-cylinder one. "We won't be able to go so fast," added the youth, "but it will serve.

"Then as long as I can't do anything, I may as well be on the hunt for the flying lizard," decided the scientist, and he set off over the desert, with his net and his specimen box.

"Is there anything we can do?" inquired Tod, as he and Jim Nestor approached Jerry.

"Nothing, I guess," replied the tall lad. "Ned and Bob will help me with the engine."

"Then we'll go off prospecting a bit," said Jim. "We may find a place to catch some fish," and he winked at Jerry, to indicate to him that he and Tod would hunt for water. And, indeed, Jerry knew there might soon be need of it, before the engine was repaired.

But nothing was said to either Ned, Bob or the professor on this score. Jerry did not want any needless alarm.

"Now, fellows," he exclaimed cheerfully, when the three chums were alone beside the ship, "let's get busy. It's going to be quite a job to take out those broken cylinders."

It was, indeed, as they soon found. The two cylinders which had been cracked by the flying wrench were in the centre of the motor. To get them out it was necessary to uncouple a number of pipes, cams, gears and wires. Fortunately there were the necessary tools on board, and all three of the lads had had considerable experience in machine work. But, even with all this, they were all day getting the two cylinders out.

"Now," announced Jerry, "it remains to be seen whether we can connect up the other eight, and use the water-cooling system to good advantage," for the motor was not an air-cooled one. "We're going to have trouble connecting

the water pipes," he predicted, as he wiped the perspiration from his face.

It had been hard work—doubly so under the broiling sun of the desert. At noon Nestor and Tod had returned, but it did not need a negative nod of Nestor's head to tell Jerry that their quest for water had been unsuccessful. They set off again in the afternoon. Professor Snodgrass had not come back to lunch, but there was nothing remarkable in this. Often in his search for a curious insect he had been known to go all day without food, and he never minded it.

Late that afternoon, while Ned and Bob were toiling away, helping Jerry, Bob went to the water tank, and, after taking a big drink, he threw away what liquid remained in the glass.

"Don't do that!" exclaimed Jerry quickly.

"Why not?"

"Because we might need it. No telling how long we will be here, and water doesn't grow on every bush." He tried to speak lightly, but Ned and Bob must have guessed what he meant, for after that it was observed that both took very small drinks.

After a restless night spent in the airship, the professor having returned just before dark, the boys started in the next day to connect up the

eight good cylinders. They found it a harder task than even Jerry had anticipated. All day they hammered, bored and filed metal. They made fitting after fitting, only to discover a leak, and then they had to do it all over again. They toiled until the perspiration of their hands and faces, mingling with the grease and grime, made them look like foundrymen. But they did not give up. After several failures, Jerry remarked:

"Say, let's knock off a bit and take a walk over the desert. It will rest us, and we can work better when we come back."

"What? Walk in that broiling sun?" asked Bob, shaking some drops of perspiration from the end of his fat nose.

"It will do you good—dry you off," declared Ned. "Come on, Jerry. I'm ready."

Professor Snodgrass was again off on a hunt for the flying lizard, and the two miners had disappeared over a little ledge of rock in search of water. The three boys started across the hot sands.

They found that the walk did rest their tired arms and cramped legs, and though there was nothing to see, and it was very hot, they rather enjoyed the stroll. They went on for a mile or

more, and then turned to go back, as night was approaching and they did not want to be away after dark.

"There comes Tod and Nestor," remarked Bob, pointing to the figures of the two miners, who were approaching the stalled airship from the southeast.

"Yes, and I s'pose the professor will be along presently. When do you think we can start again, Jerry?" asked Ned.

"I think we'll have the motor in shape to-morrow," remarked the tall lad. "I'll cut some new washers for the water pipes, and I think that will do away with the leaks."

The three lads soon joined Tod and Nestor, and the five proceeded toward the *Comet.* In the hot, thin air of the desert it looked to be not more than a hundred yards away, but they were still over half a mile from their craft.

Suddenly Bob, who was walking a little in advance, called out:

"Did you see anything move then?"

"Move? Where?" inquired Jerry, with a laugh.

"On the airship. I'm sure I saw some one on deck."

"Maybe the professor is aboard?" suggested Ned.

"No, there he comes now," said Tod, pointing off to the left, where the scientist could be observed stalking across the sand, his net over his shoulder, and his green specimen box dangling at his side.

"Somebody surely is on board," insisted Bob. "I saw him move again."

"That's right," agreed Nestor. "I saw something move, too, then."

They quickened their pace, and in a little while they were near enough so that all five could observe some shadowy form moving about on the after deck.

"If it's a man, he's going about on all fours," said Ned.

"Perhaps it's Mr. Bell," came from Bob. "Maybe he's gone crazy from the heat."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jerry, breaking into a run. The others followed. But when they were within a short distance of the craft they came to a sudden halt.

For from the airship there now came a series of ugly snarls and roars.

"What in the world is that?" cried Bob.

There was no need to answer him, for a moment later there sprang into view, in the background of a vivid sunset, a big mountain lion, who paced back and forth on the forward deck. The beast was in possession of the *Comet*.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. BELL IS FOUND

"COME on! We must drive him out of there!" cried Bob. "I left a lot of opened cans of food in the kitchen, ready for supper, and that beast will eat 'em all up! Come on, we must drive him out!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jim Nestor, catching Bob by the shoulder, as the impetuous youth was about to dash forward. "You don't know as much about them critters as I do, son. Keep away as far from 'em as you can, especially when you haven't got a gun."

"Haven't you got your gun, Jim?" asked Tod quickly.

"No; have you?"

"Nope. First time I've been without it in a long while," and the old miner looked at the place where his big revolver always hung in its leather holster.

"Same here," added Nestor. "We were fool-

ish to come away without them, but it was so hot to pack 'em over the desert, and I didn't think anything would happen."

"Me neither," agreed Tod. "That critter must have been passing, and smelled the meat tins. It concluded it liked the airship, and it's making itself to home," for the beast was leaping about from deck to deck, passing through the cabin and engine room as if it belonged there.

"Can't we do anything to get rid of him?" asked Jerry. "He may keep us out here all night."

"Have any of you boys got a gun?" asked Nestor.

None of them had, though they each had a rifle and revolver in the airship.

"Maybe we can scare him away," suggested Bob, who was getting anxious on account of the food he had left in the kitchen.

"Mountain lions don't scare very well," commented Tod. "At least, that's been my experience with them."

"Maybe the professor has a weapon," suggested Jim, after a pause, during which they had drawn a little closer to the airship. The lion seemed to resent their approach, for it kept bounding back and forth on the side of the craft

nearest the adventurers, snarling and lashing its lean, tawny sides with its tail.

The professor never carries anything more harmful than a butterfly net," replied Jerry. "I'm afraid he can't help us."

At that moment the scientist came up to where the boys and miners stood.

"I didn't get the flying lizard, after all," lamented the little bald-headed man. "But I saw one. I would have had him, only my foot slipped on a round stone, I fell down, and the lizard flew away. But what is the matter?" he asked, seeing the odd looks on the faces of his friends.

"That!" answered Jerry, pointing to the lion, which gave utterance to a roar.

"Oh, what a beautiful specimen!" exclaimed the professor with enthusiasm. "I wish I could capture it!"

"I wish you could, and skin it!" added Jim Nestor grimly. "We are likely to be kept out here all night by that beast."

"Nonsense, I'll drive him away," declared the scientist, and, with his butterfly net extended, he advanced. The lion showed his teeth and snarled in an alarming fashion.

"Come back, Professor!" cried Jim, and Mr. Snodgrass concluded he had better do so.

"Let's all advance in a body, yelling, shouting and waving our hands," proposed Jerry. "Maybe we can scare him."

But the lion didn't scare much. It bounded back and forth, snarling and howling, and seemed about to leap off the ship and attack its annoyers. The adventurers withdrew for a consultation.

"What can we do?" asked Bob. "All that grub——"

"I guess there's something more important than grub," interrupted Jerry. "We must get the motor fixed, and move off this desert."

"I should say so—away from these savage beasts," added Ned; but it was not of the beasts Jerry was thinking—it was of the lack of water.

"Let's try the yelling scheme again," suggested Tod. "Maybe it will work this time."

It was now almost dark, but an early moon gave promise of light. Once more they advanced in a body toward the ship, but the lion evinced no desire to depart. It leaped back and forth, roaring and snarling.

Professor Snodgrass left his companions and strolled around to the opposite side of the craft.

At once the lion began new tactics. It leaped from side to side of the airship, as if trying to be in two places at once.

"I have it!" cried Jerry, when he saw what was going on. "We'll divide our forces. Some of us will attract his attention to the front of the ship, and one of us can slip aboard, get a gun, and shoot him."

"Fine!" cried Jim Nestor. "The very thing! All of you get up front, and make all the fuss you can. I'll sneak aboard and get my gun."

The boys, Professor Snodgrass and Tod hurried to the bow of the *Comet,* the snarling lion following them. This drew him away from the stern. Yelling, leaping about, and making all manner of queer motions in the hazy twilight, the boys managed to hold the attention of the beast. Jim Nestor climbed softly aboard, and got his rifle. Then tiptoeing to where he could get a good shot, he took careful aim and fired.

The great, tawny beast gave a convulsive leap into the air, and toppled over on its back on the forward deck. Then it began a death struggle, which Nestor mercifully ended with another bullet.

The dead lion was thrown overboard on the sands, and the travelers congratulated themselves

on coming so well out of the ordeal. Bob soon had supper in preparation, while Jerry remained in the engine room, planning work for the morrow. He looked to see how much water was left.

"Did you find any?" he asked of Nestor, in a low voice, so Bob, Ned and the professor would not hear. The miner shook his head.

Jerry's hopes to have the engine in shape the next day were doomed to disappointment. Even with the new washers, there was a leak in the water-cooling system, and he knew he would not dare start as long as that trouble was not remedied.

"We'll have to make an entirely new pipe to establish the connection," he said to Bob and Ned, and they started that task. It was a hard one, but they finished it in two days.

"I think it will work now," announced the tall lad, at the close of a hard afternoon of work. He tested it, and found the connections as tight as could be desired. Not a drop of water came out. The propellers were set in motion to try them, and worked satisfactorily. Then the gas machine was put in operation.

"Why are we going to rise to-night?" asked Bob, in some surprise. "Why don't we stay here until morning?"

"Because," was all the reason Jerry gave, but he looked long and anxiously at the water supply, as if calculating how long it would last.

They started off just as dusk was settling down, and the airship was headed across the desert. Many miles of it yet remained, and Jerry was fearful that before they reached the limits the supply of water would give out. Much was needed for the motor, and it evaporated quickly. Little could be left for drinking purposes, and it was necessary, at all costs, to keep the engine going.

The night was hot, very hot and close, and it seemed that it would never end. On and on flew the big airship, covering mile after mile.

"Whew! I'm a regular furnace!" exclaimed Bob, getting up from his bunk. No one was sleeping. The lad went to the water tank and drew a full glass.

"Go halves with me and Ned on that, Chunky," said Jerry in a low voice.

"Halves? Why, I'll bring you a full glass in a minute," and the stout lad looked toward Jerry in the pilot house.

"No—don't!" came the quick answer. "A quarter of a glass each is all we can have—for a while."

"A quarter of a glass?" faltered Bob.

"Yes—until we cross the desert. The motor needs it more than we do," for well Jerry knew that, once the cylinders got overheated from lack of water circulating around them, they would be stalled again.

Bob choked back his thirst, but it was hard work. How they lived through that night they hardly knew afterward, but they did. The ration of water was further reduced by morning, and as the hot sun came up it showed the desert still beneath them. There was no prospect of water there.

By noon there was not another drop that could be spared for drinking, and they had to sit with parched tongues, and watch the sands slip along below them. They were not flying high, as they wanted to catch a glimpse of some lake, river or brook. But none showed—there was only the dry and sandy desert.

It seemed that they could not stand it another moment. Jerry ran the motor as fast as he dared, but it seemed to go very slowly, though in reality they made good progress.

It was about three o'clock when Ned, who was peering down from the bow of the airship, uttered a joyful cry.

"Water! Water!" he cried. "There's a brook just below us!"

Jerry stopped the *Comet* suddenly and sent it down. It needed but a glance to show that the desert was at an end. In a little green glade there was a sparkling brook.

No water ever tasted better than did that to the thirsty travelers. The boys drank with caution, warned by Nestor and Tod, for too much of the liquid at once would have made them ill. As for the professor, nothing seemed to bother him. It is doubtful if he even was aware of the shortage in the drinking supply.

No sooner had he alighted from the airship than he left the others revelling in the cool water, and began to search for the flying lizard.

The travelers remained down all night, and camped beside the little stream. In the morning they replenished their tanks, and started off again. They flew all that day, and toward the close of the afternoon they saw in the distance a small settlement.

"I think we'd better land there," was Jerry's opinion. "We don't exactly need gasolene, but if we can get some there it may stand us in good stead. I'll fill the reserve tank."

Down they settled, and as soon as they were within view of the earth a crowd flocked out to watch their descent.

"What place is this?" cried Jim Nestor, to a group of men who crowded up to the *Comet.*

"Bashfield, Colorado," was the answer.

"Then we're not far from the mountains and Lost Valley; that is as near as I can calculate," added the miner to the boys.

The ship was made fast, and Jerry learned that he could get a supply of gasolene nearby. As he and his two chums were getting out the cans to go for the liquid, a man was seen pushing his way through the crowd.

"Here, where you shovin'?" demanded a burly miner, roughly but good naturedly.

"That airship! I must see that airship!" was the answer of the man, who, it could now be seen, was quite old.

"Well, it isn't going to run away," was the retort of the big man. "Push in here, neighbor, and see it. It's a wonderful shebang. I'd like to own one."

"And I'd like to get the use of one," murmured the old man. "If I had it I could rescue——"

He did not finish, for at that moment he caught sight of Jerry and his two chums. The face of the old man lighted up.

"The Motor Boys!" he gasped.

Jerry turned at the sound of the voice.

"Mr. Bell!" exclaimed the tall lad. "Jackson Bell—the former hermit! Here!"

"That's who I am!" cried Mr. Bell, for it was indeed he. "Oh, I never thought I'd find you! I—I ran away from that Nixon fellow—because—because——"

"Come right in here," urged Jerry, helping the aged man into the cabin. "Come right in. We were all anxious about you. We've found Mr. Bell!" Jerry cried, to Nestor and Tod. "Now we can locate Lost Valley, and rescue the people from the Indians!"

CHAPTER XXII

OVER LOST VALLEY

THE crowd about the airship stared in wonder, not only at the strange craft, but at Mr. Bell, for they had heard what he had said.

"Right in here," urged Jerry, leading the aged man to the cabin. "We've been hoping against hope that we'd meet you, so that you could show us where lost valley is, and help us rescue Deering's Band."

"Deering's Band? Do you know about them? Have you heard of Lost Valley?" queried Mr. Bell, who seemed dazed.

"We were on our way there when we stopped here for gasolene," explained Bob.

"Is it possible?" murmured the former hermit. "I can't understand it."

"We'll have a general explanation soon," promised Jerry. "Come into the cabin, everyone, and we'll have a talk. The crowd will stay outside, I guess."

The crowd was too curious, however, to refrain from climbing all about the available parts of the *Comet*, but they did no harm, and as long as they kept out of the cabin the boys did not care.

"First," began Jerry, when they were all seated, "I'll tell Mr. Bell how we came to know about Lost Valley," which the lad proceeded to do, from the theft of the airship, the recovery of it, the flight of Noddy, the discovery of the letter the bully let fall, and the finding of the fragments of the one left by Mr. Bell.

"I understand now," declared the aged man. "It all fits in with what I have to tell you. I'll make it as brief as possible, as I want to start to the rescue. An airship is the only thing that can be used to save the unfortunate people, if, indeed, any are left alive. I will begin at the beginning.

"After you boys took me away from Lost Lake," he said, looking kindly at Jerry, Ned and Bob, "and had restored my son to me, I took up my residence in a small town not far from here. My son became a traveling salesman, going all over this country, and that is one reason for my delay in coming back from Cresville, where I went to find you. I haven't been able to locate my son, and lost his address, and I guess he has been

too busy to write to me. However, that does not matter now, as I expect to hear from him soon.

"Well, I lived in peace and comfort in my home in the town not far from here, and had everything an old man could wish. One day, about two months ago, as I was sitting on the front stoop, I saw an aged man pass. His clothes were in tatters, and he seemed the worst sort of a tramp. The children in the streets were abusing him, more from thoughtlessness than from any desire to harm him. I made some inquiries of them, and learned that they considered the old man crazy.

"I felt sorry for him, and, after sending the children away, I took him into my house, gave him a meal, let him have a bath, and fitted him with decent clothes. I then saw that he was not crazy, but that suffering and hardship had made him weak minded. In a few hours, after rest and nourishment, he was able to tell me his story, and a wonderful one it was, for it was the tale of the prisoners of Lost Valley."

"Was that man one of the survivors of Derring's Band?" asked Professor Snodgrass.

"He was," answered Mr. Bell solemnly.

"Mr. Snodgrass is a cousin of Amos Deering," explained Jerry.

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Mr. Bell. "Then he will be doubly interested in what I have to tell. This man, whose name was Bertram Loftus, was one of Deering's Band. As you already know, Mr. Deering led a party of prospectors in a search for gold. Some of them were friends of mine. They got to this part of the country, and heard of a fertile valley, where gold was said to be plentiful, and where conditions of life were almost ideal. They started for it, only to fall in with a band of Indians who offered to lead them to the valley.

"This the savages did, but for motives of their own. Lost Valley, as it has come to be called since, was practically a lost valley then; that is, only the Indians knew the location. They led the white people into it, taking care to make the entrance at night, and in the morning Deering and his comrades, including women and children, found themselves prisoners in the valley. There was but one way out, and the Indians closely guarded the secret of it.

"Well, the party tried to escape when they found that they were prisoners, and several were killed in the conflict, so Mr. Loftus told me. The others resigned themselves to their fate and were virtually made the slaves of their captors, who

took from them everything of value. Years went on and the children grew up, the old men and women died, until now scarcely a third of the original band is left. Many tried to escape, but either failed or were killed.

"Finally Loftus, who was a young miner when the Indians captured him, resolved to try to get away, hoping to be able to bring help. His escape was carefully planned. Indeed, he did not undertake it until many years from the time of the captivity. All those years the poor people had been held prisoners by the Indians. I suppose when the savages first led them into the valley, it was with the idea of taking what wealth they had. But the disappearance of the band attracted attention, and if there had been proof that the Indians were responsible, government troops would have been sent out, who would have exterminated the redmen. This risk of government aid made it necessary for the savages to guard their prisoners closely. Well, as I said, Loftus planned his escape, and he accomplished it after terrible hardships.

"When he finally climbed out of the valley he was almost as badly off as before. He traveled on, but his mind became a blank, and finally he found himself in my town. There the treatment

I gave him restored his reason, and he told me his story. It was three years after his escape that I came across him, and all that while the poor people in the valley had doubtless been waiting in vain for some sign of the help he promised to bring, while he had been aimlessly wandering about, having practically forgotten his mission.

"I told him I would aid him, and when he described the valley, and how difficult it was to approach, I at once thought of an airship as the only possible means. Then, naturally, I thought of you motor boys, for I had read of your *Comet*. I told Mr. Loftus that he and I would set out for Cresville, see you, and get you to help us. But the day before we were to start, Mr. Loftus died. The hardships he had suffered had been too much for him. I felt very badly, but I resolved to carry out, with your help, the work he had undertaken. After seeing that he was provided with decent burial, I started for the East, intending to seek out you boys. I sent word to my son where I was going, as he was away from home. Well, this story is getting pretty long, but it will soon be finished."

"It is intensely interesting," observed Professor Snodgrass, who, for the first time since he had joined the boys, was not looking for specimens.

"I came East," went on the former hermit, "and reached Cresville. There I met Noddy Nixon, and, on inquiring where you motor boys lived, was told. He wanted to know my errand, and foolishly I told him. I also said that the trip to Lost Valley might result in securing a large amount of gold, for Loftus said that his comrades had found a number of nuggets.

"That was indiscreet on my part, as I discovered later. Noddy Nixon untruthfully told me that he was a great friend of you boys, and that he owned part of the airship. He said you three were away from home just then, but that he would take me in the airship, and we would start for Lost Valley, picking you up on the way. I believed him, and, in company with another lad, whom he called Pender, we went one night to the airship shed. I thought at the time that it was rather odd to get it at night, but Noddy made some excuse.

"Well, we were admitted to the airship shed by the watchman, and I took my place in this cabin where we are now. Afterward I heard something of a struggle, but I thought little of it. We started off, and all seemed to go well, Noddy managing the airship quite skillfully. Then came the accident the next morning, and while he and

Pender were discussing it, I was writing a letter to my son. From something the two boys said I learned that they had stolen the airship from you, and I resolved to go away from them at once. I tore up the letter I had written to my son, telling of the attempt I was to make to rescue the poor people of the valley, and hastily fled. Noddy tried to stop me, but I would not stay. I left them, and I have not seen them since.

"Very foolishly, I thought the ship was damaged beyond repair, and I feared you would blame me. I resolved to return home until I could see my son, and have him explain matters to you. On my way here I was robbed, and had no money for carfare. No one would believe the story I told, I could get no aid, I had lost my son's address, and I had to tramp nearly all the way back West. I arrived home a week ago, and was visiting some friends here when I saw the airship come down."

"Lucky for us you did," remarked Jerry. "Now you can take us to Lost Valley."

"Are you still determined to go?" asked Mr. Bell.

"You bet!" cried Bob and Ned in a breath.

"I'm glad of it," spoke the former hermit. "I have not yet been able to communicate with my

son. I hardly knew what to do, as I wanted to fulfill the mission on which Mr. Loftus started. When I saw your airship I hoped to be able to induce the owners of it to aid me in my quest, but I had no idea I would meet you boys. I imagined your craft was hopelessly smashed."

"It wasn't Noddy's fault that it kept together after the way he handled it," observed Jerry. "But we soon had it in shape again, after he and Jack Pender ran away. We couldn't imagine what had happened to you, but it's all clear now. We'll start for Lost Valley at once."

"Hush! Not so loud," cautioned Mr. Bell. "Few people around here know the story of Deering's Band. It happened long ago, you see, and now if it was to be known that there was gold in the valley there would be a rush there, men would lose their way and be killed, and no good would result. Or, if they found the valley, and tried to enter, the Indians might kill the few remaining members of the band, to do away with all evidence against themselves. Our best plan will be to go at this quietly. Slip off, go to the valley, and try to effect a rescue. I can show you the way, for Mr. Loftus, before he died, left me a rude map of the locality."

"That's a great story," commented Jim Nestor when Mr. Bell had finished.

"It sure is," added Sledge Hammer Tod. "I want a chance to handle some of them Indians."

"You'll get it," promised Jerry. "Boys, we must go for the gasolene at once. Then we can slip away after dark, and no one will be the wiser."

They came out of the cabin. The crowd around the airship was greater than ever, and the boys and other occupants of the craft were overwhelmed with questions. They answered as well as they could, but said nothing of the object of their trip. Mr. Bell remained in the cabin, as he was tired.

In a short time the water, oil and gasolene tanks were refilled, and then supper was served, with Bob, of course, in the rôle of cook.

It was quite late ere the last of the stragglers had seen enough of the airship and departed. Then, when all was in readiness, the bag was filled with gas, and an ascent was made without the use of the planes or propellers, thus rendering their departure noiseless. When the *Comet* was about two thousand feet high, the propellers were started.

"Which way shall we head, Mr. Bell?" asked Jerry, as he took his place in the pilot house.

"Northeast," was the former hermit's reply, as he consulted the map left by the man who had escaped from Lost Valley. "We are several hundred miles from the place."

"We can reach it by to-morrow," announced Jerry, a grim look on his face.

All that night the airship rushed on, and in the morning it was still crossing the rugged mountains. On and on it flew. Now the scene below would be lost in a dense fog, and again sharp peaks would rear themselves from the sea of mist. On and on they went, never halting.

It was toward evening that Mr. Bell, who by turns had been looking at the map and observing the landscape below through a telescope, suddenly called out:

"Slow down, Jerry!"

"What's the matter? Are we going to hit something?" inquired the tall lad, who was in the motor room, while Ned was steering.

"No, there's no danger of hitting anything," answered Mr. Bell, "but just ahead of us I see the tall peak that marks the entrance to Lost Valley."

"Lost Valley? Are we there?" cried Ned, as he threw the propellers out of gear.

"We're almost there," replied the former hermit.

A moment later the curtain of mist was brushed aside by the wind, and the travelers saw below them a long, narrow valley held between sheer cliffs of great height. It was no wonder that escape from it was almost impossible. An instant later the airship had swung farther over the deep chasm, and then the white vapor was once more brushed across the valley, shutting it from view.

"The fog served us a good turn," said Jim Nestor. "It will prevent the Indians from sighting us."

"We'll descend now," decided Jerry, "anchor for the night, and then decide what is best to do."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FLICKERING LIGHTS

WILD and desolate was the region in which the adventurers now found themselves. They were in the midst of the mountains, seemingly with no civilization near, yet they knew that within a few miles of them was the remains of an intrepid body of whites and a band of savage Indians.

The airship was anchored in a comparatively level place, and Bob, as usual, prepared the meal. Jerry and Ned busied themselves about the craft, making some minor adjustments to the machinery, and seeing that it was in shape for quick service.

"Have you thought how you are going to rescue those people, in case you can get down into the valley?" asked Jim Nestor of Jerry.

"Why, yes; go right down in the valley and get them," decided the tall lad.

"What about the Indians?"

"We'll have to fight them, I suppose," added Ned.

"There are quite a number," declared Mr. Bell. "If possible, it would be better to do the rescue work quietly. The redmen may prove too many for us."

"Yes, when you're dealing with an Indian, the quieter you can go about things, the better," put in Tod. "Surprise 'em, if you can."

"Well, I'll be guided by you, Mr. Bell and Mr. Nestor," replied Jerry deferentially. "I admit I don't know much about fighting Indians."

"Do you think you can get on this airship all the people you hope to rescue?" asked Professor Snodgrass.

"It depends on how many there are."

"There can't be more than ten," answered Mr. Bell. "Mr. Loftus said there were fifteen left when he escaped. Some were so old and feeble then that there was scarcely any hope for them. Not more than ten left, I should say."

"I hope my cousin, Amos Deering, is among them," remarked the scientist.

"He was alive and in good health when Mr. Loftus made his escape," said the former hermit. "He was looked up to as a sort of chief by the Indians, who treated him better than they did

the others, of whom they made slaves, and compelled them to assist in some peculiar form of worship they have. I understood from Mr. Loftus that the Indians venerated a form of lizard."

"A lizard!" exclaimed Professor Snodgrass. "You don't by any possible chance mean a flying lizard, do you?"

"That's exactly what Mr. Loftus said it was," came the unexpected reply from the aged man. "They worship a big flying lizard, of which there are numbers in the valley. It is as sacred to them as the beetle was to the Egyptians. There are many of them, and——"

"Then I shall get my specimens, after all!" cried the little bald-headed man. "Let us start for the valley at once!" and he jumped to his feet in his excitement.

"We can't see to do anything until morning," objected Tod. "Then we'll start in."

"Then I wish morning would come quickly," went on the professor, as eager as a child over a new toy. "I want a flying lizard very much."

"Can the airship carry ten additional persons?" asked Jim Nestor of Jerry.

"Yes, for a while, though of course we have not rations enough for that number for very long."

"You will not need do more than rescue them from the valley," said Mr. Bell eagerly. "I will take charge of them after that, and they can stay at my house. I can make room for them."

"Well, if it proves to be true about the gold they discovered in the valley," went on Nestor, "they can pay their own way."

"I can't say that I take much stock in that gold business," came from Sledge Hammer Tod. "I've heard too many stories of gold in mysterious valleys, and generally they were fakes."

"I believe there is gold in Lost Valley, and that the prisoners have some," insisted Mr. Bell firmly. "Whether we will be able to rescue them or not is another matter."

They talked until far into the night of what lay before them, and then, as they expected to have a hard day of adventures when the sun rose, it was decided to go to bed.

It must have been around two o'clock that Jerry awakened with a start. At first he thought some one had called him, but he waited and listened; he heard no one else stirring aboard the anchored *Comet*.

"Guess I dreamed it," he mused; "but, as long as I'm awake, I'll get a drink of water."

He went to the tank, and, as he passed the

cabin window that looked toward Lost Valley, Jerry was startled by seeing strange lights flickering up toward the sky.

"Northern lights," was his exclamation; and then, as he stood and watched the mysterious beams, he realized that his first impression was wrong. For the lights seemed to reach from the earth to the sky, and did not emanate from the heavens. Nor did they have the usual characteristics of Northern lights. They were more like the beams from some searchlight. They were six in number, and seemed to wave to and fro.

"That's odd," remarked the lad. "Guess I'll call Bob and Ned, and see what they think of 'em."

He awoke his chums, and the three gazed at the flickering lights.

"Electricity, I guess," remarked Ned.

"That's it," agreed Bob. "Probably there's a storm somewhere in the mountains."

"Those lights are not from electricity, nor are they the reflection of some storm," spoke a voice at the side of the boys, and they turned to see Professor Snodgrass standing beside them. "See how the lights wave to and fro regularly," he added. "The color, too, is not natural. It is

like the reflection from some fire, in which smoke is mingled."

"What do you suppose causes them?" inquired Jerry.

"Human beings," was the quick answer. "I think those are signal lights."

"You're right," came another voice, and Mr. Bell, who, like the professor, had been awakened by the boys, came to the window. "Those are signal lights," went on the aged man.

"Where from?" asked Jerry.

"From Lost Valley. The Indians are signaling."

"Have they discovered our presence?" Bob wanted to know.

"Perhaps," was the answer. "But it is more likely that the Indians in the valley are signaling to some of their number who have gone outside for food and supplies, which is their custom. Mr. Loftus told me that they generally signal by means of fires made from a peculiar wood, and the gleams from the blazes are thrown up into the air, out of the valley, from highly polished stones."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that explanation," remarked Bob, with a little shiver. "I was beginning to think they were ghost lights."

CHAPTER XXIV

BUSHES OF DEATH

THEY watched the strange lights for some time, as the luminous shafts flickered up to the sky and died out. Then, when the last of them had vanished, the adventurers went back to bed.

In the morning various plans were talked over, but the one finally decided on was this:

The airship would be sent over the valley, traversing it along its entire length, but sufficiently high so that the Indians down below—or, for that matter, their white captives—could not discern it. For the rescue party wanted to remain in seclusion.

By means of powerful telescopes the valley would be carefully inspected, and, if possible, a place would be picked out where the airship could land.

"For we've got to go down sooner or later, if we expect to rescue those poor people," said Jerry. "We can't keep in the air all the while,

and lower ropes to them so that they can climb up. That would answer for sailors, but not for old men and women. We will have to land, and if we pick out a secluded spot we may be able to descend without attracting the attention of the Indians. Then we can plan further to make the rescue."

This was decided on, and they sailed slowly onward, Jerry and Jim Nestor and Mr. Bell taking turns at scanning the deep chasm through the telescope. They saw that the valley was a fertile place, and that many fields for crops were laid out, showing that the Indians or their white captives were industrious. Small houses or huts could be observed, built in some sort of order, like a small village. All these were in the centre of the valley through which ran a small stream, giving plenty of water. At either end of the big chasm there were wild and desolate spots, and it could be seen that the sides of the place were so steep and rugged that climbing them was out of the question. Yet the Indians had a path in and out, but they guarded the secret well, since only one man in all those years had been able to discover it. Later it was learned that the pass, by which Mr. Loftus escaped was not the one the Indians used, and soon after he left it was located

and closed by the Redmen, thus making it impossible for any other of the captives to take advantage of it.

"Can you see any persons moving about in the valley?" asked Jerry, as he handed the telescope to Jim Nestor.

"I thought I could, the last time I looked," was the answer, "but I'm not sure. I'll look again."

He peered long and earnestly through the glass, and then uttered an exclamation.

"There are some of the red beggars!" cried the mine superintendent. "They are having a regular procession, and seem to be going in some sort of a church."

"Probably they are going to worship the flying lizard," observed Mr. Bell. "Mr. Loftus said they hold services several times during the day and night."

"The flying lizard!" exclaimed Professor Snodgrass. "Let's descend at once, and get some of those most valuable specimens! They are worth five hundred dollars each."

"And our lives wouldn't be worth five cents apiece," spoke Sledge Hammer Tod quickly, "if we went down there among those savages now. It would be all up with us!"

"Can you see any white persons?" inquired Mr. Bell anxiously, as Jerry finished his observation through the telescope.

"No," answered the lad. "It's hard to distinguish any figures at all, and I don't want to go lower, for fear they may sight us. I can't tell whether those I see are Indians or whites. Can you, Jim?"

"No. Very likely the white people are nearly like the redmen now, from having lived among them so long."

Over the whole length of the valley went the airship, but nothing more was disclosed. There were no indications that the presence of the *Comet* was observed, and, having gotten to the end of the big defile, the craft was sent back.

It was decided that a place just inside, but at the lower end of the valley, and near the spot where they had first landed after sighting the chasm, would be the best place on which to descend. As they neared it, on their return trip, a wall of fog shut it from view, but as its location had been carefully observed on the first trip, little apprehension was felt.

The adventurers returned to the place of their first camp in the mountains, just outside the valley, and prepared to stay there until it should be

dark enough to make the descent into the abode of the prisoners.

"If we could only drop some message to the poor captives," suggested Bob, "then they would know we were coming for them."

"It wouldn't be safe," declared Jerry. "The Indians might get it and decipher it. We'll have to take our chances at notifying them suddenly."

After it grew dark the same mysterious lights were observed that had puzzled the travelers the first night. The adventurers decided to wait until the flickering gleams died away before venturing on a descent.

It was nearly three o'clock before this time came, and then Jerry, who had been on the watch, awakened the others. The airship was in readiness for a quick and silent move. The restraining ropes were cast off, and it rose high in the air. Then, running the motor at half-speed, to reduce the noise, Jerry guided the craft over the valley. The searchlight was brought into play to locate the landing place. There was a certain risk in this, but it could not be avoided, and it was hoped that the gleams from the big lantern would be taken for the flashing of some of the Indians' own signal fires.

Lower and lower sank the *Comet,* into the

mysterious valley. Lower and lower, until, with no alarm having been sounded by the Indians, it came to rest in the secluded and wildly desolate spot that had been picked out that day. In the darkness it landed, and Ned opened the gas valve so that there would be no necessity for fastening the ship to the earth.

"Well, here we are," said Bob in a low voice, as he tried to penetrate the darkness. "And land sakes! how sleepy I am. I had a good rest, too, but it seems as if I'd been awake two nights."

"I'm sleepy, too," admitted Jerry; while as for Ned, no sooner had he finished helping Jerry make a landing than he tumbled into his bunk and was snoring.

"What's that funny smell?" asked Jim Nestor, sniffing the air. "Don't you notice it, Tod?"

"I do notice something peculiar," replied the old miner. "But I'm too sleepy to care. I'm going to turn in."

"I guess we'd all better do that," added Jerry, stifling a yawn. "I don't know when I've been so sleepy. I s'pose it's on account of having been up so much nights lately."

Professor Snodgrass, who had been peering about in the darkness, sniffing vigorously on various sides of the airship, suddenly entered the

cabin. The sight that met his eyes was a curious one. Stretched out on the bunks were all the members of the party save himself. Everyone was either asleep or preparing to slumber. The bald-headed scientist once more breathed the peculiar odor on the night air, then he cried out:

"Jerry! Ned! Bob! Wake up, everyone! Don't go to sleep!"

"Why not?" asked Bob drowsily.

"Because we have landed in a thicket of the bushes of death!"

"The bushes of death?" asked Jerry, almost too sleepy to know what he was saying. "What are they?"

"Bushes that give off a peculiar odor," answered the scientist. "It is death to breathe it—death by a slow languor that begins with a sleep. No wonder the Indians avoid this end of the valley. It is death to sleep here! We must all keep awake until morning, and then move to some other location. Wake up, everyone!" and he began shaking the sleepers vigorously, for they all were stretched out, with closed eyes. The bushes of death had already begun to exert an influence over them.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PROFESSOR'S COUSIN

THOUGH Professor Snodgrass worked desperately to keep his companions awake, he was at a disadvantage, for he, too, was beginning to feel the influence of the unseen but deadly bushes. His eyes were heavy, and his feet began to lag as he hurried about the cabin, shaking first one and then another of the men or boys.

"Wake up, Bob—Jerry!" he cried, but Bob only answered as he fell back in his bunk:

"Oh, let me alone! I'm so sleepy and tired!"

"Yes," murmured the scientist, "but it means rest forever if you sleep now! Wake up!" and he punched Bob vigorously.

The professor himself was fighting like a Trojan to ward off sleep.

"I must do something to save them—save myself," he thought, as he looked on Tod and Nestor, both slumbering heavily, while it seemed that Jerry's breathing was already becoming less vigorous as the deadly fumes overcame him. "I can't

move the airship alone," thought the scientist, "and it would hardly be safe to do so in the darkness. Yet I must take some action. If there was only some way of overcoming the fumes, or making them less harmful——" he paused suddenly in his musing. His scientific mind was at work. Already he was recalling what he knew of the fatal bushes. He had once analyzed the juice from them, for it was from the sap that the exhalation came, carrying death. The bushes only gave off the odor at night. In the day they were harmless.

"I must make some other kind of fumes that will neutralize those of the bushes of death," reasoned Professor Snodgrass. "Let me see what will be the most effective."

He had a small stock of chemicals with him, and it did not take him long to decide which he would use. He made a mixture of sulphur, carbolic acid, creosote and some other acids, and placed them in a pan. This he placed on top of the gasolene stove, and lighted a fire beneath it. All the while the scientist himself was fighting off sleep, but as he was vigorously moving about, and as he realized what it would mean to succumb, it served to keep him awake. The others were slumbering more heavily.

Rapidly the professor worked. When the mixture was sending forth the badly smelling fumes, which, however, would serve to kill the exhalations from the bushes, the scientist carried the pan into the cabin. Then, suspending it over a small lamp, he caused a still greater vapor to be given off. The cabin was filled with the fumes.

"Wake up now! Wake up!" urged the scientist again, as he roused the sleepers. Already the good effects of the boiling mixture were apparent, for Mr. Snodgrass felt less sleepy. Once he had aroused the others, he knew they would be comparatively safe. He managed, after strenuous work, to shake them so that they opened their eyes. Jerry was the hardest to arouse, for he had worked hard that day, and was exhausted. But finally they were all sitting up, staring stupidly about them, scarcely aware of what had taken place, yet knowing it was something unusual. They sniffed the strong odor, and it served to drive out from their lungs the fumes of the bushes. In a little while the air of the cabin was entirely void of the dangerous exhalations. The carbolic acid and other chemicals had neutralized them.

"Now, Bob, make strong coffee," urged the

professor. "That will complete the work I started and will make us all feel better."

"What happened?" asked Ned drowsily, while the others rubbed their heavy eyes.

The professor explained. Soon Bob had made a big pot of the strong beverage, and it was gratefully received.

"We'd better get away from this place as soon as we can," remarked Jerry, when he was himself again. "We must move the ship at once."

"There is no need of that," the professor assured him. "With the fumes from the chemicals filling the airship, it will be perfectly safe to stay here. It does not smell very nice, but it is better than being killed by sleep. We can now shut our eyes and take an ordinary nap, without fear. The chemicals will boil all night. In the morning there will be no danger, for the plants only exhale an odor at night. Then, when it is light, we can see to move the ship to a place where there are none of the bushes of death."

This plan was followed, but it was not without a little feeling of fear that the adventurers stretched out once more for a needed rest. The night passed safely, however, though they all awoke with a heavy feeling, due to the fumes they

had been obliged to breathe in order to preserve their lives. They hurried out to the fresh air as soon as it was daylight, and inhaled deeply of the oxygen.

"There are the dangerous bushes," announced the professor, pointing to a tangle of them near the bow of the airship. "I think we can find a place where there are none. And I think we can move the ship there without danger of the Indians seeing us. If I know anything about savages, they will avoid this end of the valley. It may be that they depend on the bushes of death to keep their white captives from escaping this way, by impressing on them the danger of never-waking sleep should they venture here."

The boys gathered about the scientist, and looked toward the clump of peculiar-looking bushes. The leaves resembled long green serpents, and waved and wiggled uncannily in the breeze, not unlike so many reptiles.

After breakfast, following some cautious scouting on the part of the boys, the airship was slightly inflated, and, moving along but a short distance above the ground, was taken to another location, well away from the bushes of death.

"Now," remarked Jerry, when they had all

gathered in the cabin, "we must consider how we are to save these poor people. What is to be our first move?"

"We had first better get some information as to how the land lies," remarked Jim Nestor. "We want to find where the houses of the whites are located, what is the best time to attempt the rescue, when the Indians are least likely to be about, and information of that sort. Yes, we must do some scouting."

"That's what," agreed Tod, "and I was about to propose that Jim and I undertake it. We know something of Indians, even if these redmen are of a strange tribe. We'll get the information you need."

"Such information would certainly be desirable," put in Mr. Bell. "My late friend, Mr. Loftus, did not go much into details on those points. We must depend on a surprise to overcome the Indians. If we only could get word to the whites that we are here, they could, perhaps, tell us how to proceed."

"That's hardly possible," remarked Jerry. "I guess we will have to depend on Jim and Mr. Tod. Still, that's somewhat dangerous, for if they discover them it will be all up——"

Bob, who had gone out on the forward deck, came hurrying in, his face white with fear. He was trembling.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, noticing his chum's agitation.

"There's a man—outside—he's looking at the airship," stammered Chunky. "An old man, with a long white beard. He's coming this way."

"The Indians!" cried Ned. "They have discovered us!"

Jim Nestor and Sledge Hammer Tod reached for their rifles, and looked to the revolvers at their side. Jerry, hardly knowing what he was doing, started from the cabin to go out on deck. He was followed by Mr. Bell and the professor.

As soon as they reached the deck they saw the old man. He was staring at the airship, as if in a dream, and it needed but a glance at him, to tell that he was a white, and not an Indian. At the sight of the figures of Jerry and his friends, the man uttered a cry, and started forward. At the same instant Professor Snodgrass fairly leaped overboard from the ship to the ground. He rushed toward the old man, with outstretched arms.

"Amos Deering!" cried the scientist! "My

long-lost cousin! Amos Deering, of all men in the world!"

The old man seemed dazed. He stood still. Then he spoke in a hollow voice:

"Who are you, and why are you here?"

"I am your cousin, Uriah Snodgrass," was the reply, "and we have come in this airship to save you and all the others!"

CHAPTER XXVI

PLANNING THE ESCAPE

THE announcement of Professor Snodgrass seemed to add to the confusion of the aged man who stood and stared at the airship. He made no motion to return the greeting of the scientist.

"Don't you understand?" repeated the little bald-headed man. "We've come to save you, Amos. You are Amos Deering, aren't you? I recognized you at once, though it has been many years since I have seen you. We all gave you up for dead."

"I might better be dead—I and all the rest of us, than captives as we are," was the despairing answer.

"But you are going to be saved!" cried the professor.

"Saved?" repeated Mr. Derring, for it was indeed he. "I can scarcely believe that. All hope of escape was given up years ago. We thought one of our number—Loftus by name—

would bring aid, but we have heard nothing from him these three years."

"And it is due to him that we are here now!" cried Mr. Bell. "We have come to save you!"

A gleam of interest lighted up the dull eyes of the old man. He seemed struggling to recall some long-forgotten facts, and then, as the professor and Mr. Bell went over in brief the story of how they had arrived, Mr. Deering exclaimed:

"It hardly seems possible. Are we to be saved? I did not recognize you, Uriah, when I saw you running toward me."

"I would have known you anywhere," said the professor. He had a wonderful memory, or he never could have classified so many strange insects. "But come into the cabin," urged the scientist. "You are just in time. We were planning how we might rescue all of your party who are yet alive, and we needed to communicate with some members of it."

"There are only eight left," was the sad answer. "Five men and three women. But it will seem wonderful to them when I take them word that you are here. Wonderful! Wonderful!"

"How is it that the Indians allowed you to come this far alone?" asked Mr. Bell. "Loftus said they guarded you closely."

"They do, usually," answered aged Mr. Deering, "but now they are preparing for the annual flying lizard feast——"

"The flying lizard feast!" interrupted the professor. "Is it possible for me to secure some of those wonderful insects, Amos?"

"Perhaps," was the answer. "But it will be risky, for they are much venerated by the savages."

"Hadn't we better rescue these poor people first?" suggested Jim Nestor, "and let the lizards go?"

"Of course we'll make the rescue first," agreed the scientist, "but I'm not going to leave this valley until I have one of those valuable insects. No, not if I have to enter the temple alone and defy all the Indians in it."

"I'll help you," said Mr. Bell, who had formed a liking for the professor. "But suppose your cousin tells us his story."

"It is soon told," answered Mr. Deering. "As I said, the Indians are preparing for a great feast, in connection with the annual changing of the flying lizard. Every year they take one lizard from the temple, and either kill it or let it fly away to the woods, and substitute a new one. There are strange ceremonies connected with this,

and a great feast. At such times they relax their vigilance over us, but not sufficiently to permit us to escape. I took advantage to-day of the fact that most of the Indians are preparing for the feast, and slipped away. I wanted to be alone and think. You can imagine my surprise when I saw this great airship here. I thought I had suddenly gone insane."

"And you say there are only eight of you left?" asked Jerry. "How can we best rescue them, for we are determined to take you and them away?"

"It will be a difficult task, I fear," answered Mr. Deering, "but if you attempt it, the best time will be two nights hence, when they are at the lizard feast. Then we captives are allowed to be together and are not guarded, though at other times we are virtually slaves. I will tell my friends that you are here, and we will be in readiness."

Mr. Deering then related, in brief, the story of how he and his comrades, years before, had been enticed into the valley by the Indians. The story is already known to my readers, so I will not again go over it. Sufficient to say that the aged man gave more details and told of the numerous times they had tried to escape, and how most of their number had gradually died. The

Indians were not specially cruel to them, he added, but kept them close prisoners. There was but one way out of the valley, and this was known only to the Indians, though Loftus had managed to find a path that served him. This, however, was now closed.

The valley was a fertile one, and most of the things needed could be raised in it. Occasionally parties of the Indians would go out, and then those who stayed behind, to guard the captives, would light signal fires to show their companions the way back. It was these lights our friends had seen.

Aside from the worship of the flying lizard, the traits of the Indians were not greatly different from others of their kind. They had all the redman's failings and savagery.

"The feast of the lizard and the ceremonies connected with it, take place in a large temple, or council house, in the middle of the village," explained Mr. Deering. "There, two nights hence, will be gathered all the savages."

"And then we will come to the rescue!" exclaimed Jerry. "Between then and now we will form our plans. Can you come out to us again, so that we can tell them to you?"

"I'll try," answered the old man. "I think I

will be able to do so. And another thing: you will be well paid for your trouble, for we captives, unknown to the Indians, have a fortune in gold nuggets hidden away."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN DISGUISE

FOR a moment after the announcement of Mr. Deering about the gold no one spoke. Then Mr. Bell said:

"That is the story told by Loftus, but I feared his mind was wandering."

"No, it is true," went on the professor's cousin. "One of the huts assigned to us happened to be over a rich deposit of gold. I and some others discovered it when we were digging a tunnel to escape in the early days of our captivity. We soon gave up the plan of tunneling out of the valley, and dug for the gold. We found plenty, which we hid, but we never imagined it would be of any service to us, for we had given up hope of escaping."

"And now you'll soon have a chance to spend some of it," observed Nestor with a laugh. "If everything goes well, and I don't see why it shouldn't, you'll soon be in civilization again,

with your friends, and can see something of the world."

"To go back into the world again!" cried the old man, with emotion. "How strange it sounds to hear those words! We expected to die and be buried in Lost Valley, with never a sight of our friends or relatives again. Now I have hope!" He paused for an instant, as if overcome by his thoughts, and then added: "I must hurry back now, or I shall be missed, as it is getting late. But I will return here the first chance I get."

Following the aged man's departure several plans were discussed. Jim Nestor proposed that the attack be made on the Indians while they were at their services in the temple of the flying lizard.

"If we do that, some of us will have to be on hand to know just when that time is," objected Tod. "We'll have to be in the temple, or near it."

"Exactly," agreed Jim. "That's my idea. You and I can go, watch our chance, notify the white captives to slip away, and, if necessary, stand off the Indians, for they may catch on, and try to stop the rescue. Yes, Tod, you and I will have to go to the temple of the flying lizard, if there is such an insect."

"Oh, there is!" cried Professor Snodgrass. "I know it. But I must beg of you to allow me to be of the party, for it will be my only chance to secure one of the curious insects. I, also, must go to the temple."

"I'd like to go, too," spoke Ned. "I want to see the curious rites of the ceremony."

"Well," remarked Jerry, with a smile, "I guess we all would like to go, but it's hardly possible. I suggest we draw lots for it. Four of us will go, and the others stay here to defend the ship if necessary. There may be a fight."

"Couldn't you take the airship near enough, make a sudden descent, and pick up the people who could be in waiting?" suggested Mr. Bell.

"I'm afraid not," answered Jerry. "We would have to sail so slowly that we would loose steerage way, and then, too, if the Indians are celebrating they'll have many fires, and the airship would show plainly. They would detect us, rush out, and, perhaps, damage the ship, which would be low down. Then we would all be captives together."

"I guess Jerry's right," added Jim Nestor. "We will have to work in the dark. That is, sneak into the temple, watch our chance, and, when the right time comes, which will be when

the Indians are so busy they won't notice us, and then lead the whites to where the airship is. Here is as good a place for it as any. Then we can fly off before the Indians see us. Get the lots ready, Jerry. I hope I'm one to go."

He was; Jerry, Ned and the professor drawing the remaining lucky slips. This would leave Tod, Mr. Bell and Bob to defend the airship. The professor was delighted at his success.

"Now I will get the flying lizard!" he cried.

Toward dusk Mr. Deering came back. He seemed ten years younger since hearing the good news, and reported that his friends were eager for the time to come for the rescue.

"I have brought some disguises that you may want to wear, in case any of you plan to come to the Indian village," said the aged man, producing a bundle which contained suits of very thin skins. "The Indians use these in some of their dances," he went on, "and there are face masks, false beards and wigs which will change you from whites into redmen very quickly. I have four suits, which I took from the temple."

"Just the thing!" cried Jerry. "We will put them on when we go to rescue your friends. I was wondering how we could approach unobserved." The details of the escape were then

told to Mr. Deering, and he was instructed to have his friends in waiting at a point he designated near the temple. At the proper time they would be led to the airship, as it was considered best not to have them attempt to reach it unaccompanied by some of the rescuers.

"I'll not come out here again," said the aged prisoner, "for some of the Indians are already suspicious. We will expect you to-morrow night, when the feast is at its height."

It seemed to the adventurers in the airship that the next night would never come, but it did at last, and was ushered in with a rain storm.

"Bur-r-r-r! We're going to get wet!" complained Ned, as the four were about to set out.

"Don't kick," advised Jerry. "It will be all the better for us. The rain will make the feast fires burn dimly."

"And the flying lizards won't be able to fly so well," added the professor, as if the whole expedition was for that object alone.

Sledge Hammer Tod was made a sort of captain of the slender forces left to guard the airship, and he got out the guns and revolvers, of which there were quite a collection, and in which task he was aided by Bob.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MYSTERIOUS RITES

THE rain seemed to come down harder than ever when the four members of the rescue party started to make their way along the strange valley. Mr. Deering had told them the route to follow, or they might have become confused in the storm and darkness.

"Have you got your revolvers handy, Jerry, and Ned?" asked Jim Nestor, as they trudged along.

"Yes," replied the tall lad, "but I hope there will be no occasion to use them."

On they hurried, the rain coming down harder than ever. But the Indian disguises of animal skins served a good purpose, for they were waterproof.

As they turned around a bend in the trail they came in full view of the Indian encampment, or, rather village, for it was a permanent town, with log huts arranged neatly in rows, or streets. In the centre of a sort of public square could be seen

a large building. This was evidently the place where the ceremonies were to take place, for it was lighted up, and outside it, in spite of the rain, several fires blazed. It was evident that some sort of oil or grease kept them from going out.

Proceeding on a little farther, the four rescuers found themselves in the very midst of the village. Now indeed were they in danger for, from the houses on every side, came Indians—men, women and children there were—all hurrying toward the temple, or council house. And every one was in disguise. Some were attired as birds and some as beasts, while a few elected to represent serpents, and crawled along on all fours. It was well that Mr. Deering had thought to provide the four suits of skins for our friends, or they would hardly have been able to penetrate into the very heart of the savage town without being detected.

"There's the medicine mens' hut," whispered Jerry to Jim as they came closer to the temple, and saw near it, a smaller cabin. At that moment the four rescuers were comparatively alone, and it was safe to make this remark. The miner nodded, and the next moment our friends found themselves the centre of a throng that was hurrying into the big council house.

The four had planned to stay near the outer doors, as they wanted to be where they could get out quickly when the time came. This would be when the mysterious rites were at their height, and would be at the point when the old flying lizard was taken away and a new one, to remain in place for the coming year, was substituted.

The interior of the temple presented a wonderful sight, and, had Jerry and Ned and the others not been nervous over the parts they were playing, they would have found much to marvel over, and admire. The walls were hung with the skins of wild animals, mingled with the feathers of birds, dyed various brilliant hues.

At one end of the building, which seemed to consist mainly of one big room, was a raised platform, and on this were many Indians, evidently the medicine men. They were attired in all sorts of horrid and weird costumes, some representing animals, and some combinations of men and beasts. There was a sort of altar, and on this there was a large round stone, that glittered like gold. The attention of everyone seemed focused on this stone.

The temple was now almost filled with the Indians, who crowded every available place, and yet others kept coming to see and to hear what

was going on. Our friends kept near a doorway, and watched everything narrowly.

Though they were in some fear lest they be discovered, in which case their lives would instantly have paid the forfeit, they need not have been alarmed—at least just then. They looked too much like all the Indians around them, and, besides, every savage was too intent on the ceremonies about to take place to glance at his neighbors.

The four rescuers had not been in the place more than ten minutes before the weird rites began. The medicine men first started a monotonous chant, keeping time as they marched around the altar containing the golden stone. Their voices rose above the patter of the rain on the roof, and filled the great structure. The place was lighted by torches, and fires burning along the sides, while occasionally, through the opened windows, could be seen the gleams of the signal blazes, reflected from the polished stones. These were to call in any wandering parties of savages.

Suddenly the chant ceased, and all the Indians bowed down. Jerry and his friends did the same. When they rose they saw that the medicine men stood in a half circle about the altar. One Indian, evidently the leader, began a strange, high-pitched

song, and, at the close, he rushed to the golden stone, and struck it a blow with a stick he carried. Instantly the stone opened and from the interior the medicine man drew out a curious object.

By the start of the professor, whose eyes lighted on it, Jerry and the others knew what it was—the flying lizard. High up over his head the medicine man held the odd creature, a crawling reptile, about a foot long, which, as it was elevated, spread out four green wings. It was a strange and fearsome creature, but the professor fairly trembled with eagerness as he beheld it.

After holding it in the air a moment the chief medicine man cried out what was evidently a question. It was answered by a shout from all the people. Then he made a motion as if about to kill the flying lizard, but, instead, handed it to one of the medicine men surrounding him. The Indian, carrying the reptile, started to leave the temple. At the same time, from some source which the rescuers could not detect, another flying lizard was produced. It was held up as the first had been. Again came the question from the chief medicine man, and again the answer, in a shouted chorus. This was evidently the new lizard, for it was placed inside the gold stone, which was closed up again.

Then the medicine men took up their chant once more, and began to march around the altar, while the whole concourse of people, in their strange costumes, prostrated themselves flat on their faces on the floor of the temple.

"Now's our chance!" whispered Nestor to the others. "We can slip out now, and none of them will see us. We'll go to the hut, get the eight prisoners and escape! The feasting will begin in a little while, and the Indians will be too interested to notice anything."

"All right," answered Jerry in a whisper. They turned quickly, and left the temple. The people were still on their faces. The Indian who had been given the old lizard to dispose of was seen hurrying back up the middle aisle. Evidently he wanted to join in the rites.

"Oh, where did he put that beautiful specimen?" murmured the professor. "I must have it!"

"No time for that now," answered Jim.

They were out of the temple by this time, and hurrying toward the medicine men's hut. As they ran on, the professor in the rear, and with Ned, Jerry and Jim Nestor, grasping, under their skin disguises, their revolvers, the scientist suddenly

uttered a low cry. Jerry turned, and saw something green glittering on the ground.

"The lizard! The flying lizard!" exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass in a hoarse whisper. "The Indian did not kill it, after all. I have you, oh, my beauty!"

He stooped, caught up the nasty looking creature, and quickly put it in his green specimen box. Then he hastened on with the others toward the hut. From inside the temple came a weird chant.

"Now for the rescue!" cried Jerry.

They reached the hut, which was in a shadow. As they were at the entrance, there emerged from it eight figures.

"We are here," spoke Mr. Deering. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes," answered Jerry. "Come with us now, we will save you."

There was no reply from the others, but Ned thought he heard a woman sobbing. It was a long hope realized. The prisoners had been rescued, but they had yet to be taken from the deep valley and away from their savage captors.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FIGHT

SILENTLY the little band—the rescuers and the rescued ones—filed past the temple. They had to cross in front of it to take the path which led to where the airship was anchored, but they thought there would be little danger, on account of the important ceremonies going on.

"You take the lead, Jerry," advised Jim Nestor in a low voice. "I'll guard the rear. Have your guns handy. No telling what may happen, but it looks as if we were going to make a quiet getaway."

Alas for their hopes! They were at the temple entrance now, when there suddenly emerged one of the medicine men. He was the same one who had been given the lizard to destroy.

For a moment the Indian, after reaching the door, stared about him. He was evidently searching for the reptile he had carelessly laid down. Possibly he had been reproved for his hasty ac-

tion, in throwing the reptile away, and been sent back to finish the work. But the flying lizard was not to be seen, and good reason, for, at that moment it was in the professor's green box.

The medicine man, not seeing it, stepped from the threshold of the council house. His eyes roved over the ground, that was illuminated by distant blazes, which were brighter, now that the rain had somewhat ceased. Then the Indian looked up, and caught sight of the figures moving past the temple. At first he must have taken them for some of his fellows, but at that moment the lizard which the professor had placed alive in his specimen box, uttered a sort of curious squeak. There was no mistaking it, and the medicine man's sharp ears told him from whence the sound came. He must have suspected something, for, though the captives, like the rescuers, were dressed in skin disguises, the Indian sprang at them, and caught hold of one—a woman.

Instantly there was confusion. The Indian set up a yell which at once stopped the weird chant inside the temple. Then the lone medicine man began to drag the escaping woman toward the big building. Jerry and Ned drew their revolvers.

"We've got to fight!" exclaimed the tall lad.

The Indian was dragging the woman from the restraining grasp of her companions. Jim Nestor stepped up to him.

"That will be about all from you!" exclaimed the miner. His fist shot out, and the Indian dropped like a log. Nor did he shout any longer. He had been knocked unconscious. "That's better than using a gun," explained Nestor. "Now scoot for it—everybody!"

They needed no urging. The pursuit would begin any moment. Already several of the Indians were running from the temple in response to the call from the medicine man, and the ceremonies had evidently been brought to an abrupt end.

"Come on!" cried Jerry. "I only hope we can stand them off until we reach the airship. Are all your friends here, Mr. Deering?"

"All that are left of us," was the sad reply.

The captives and their rescuers hastened on. By good luck they were now beyond the gleams cast by the nearest fires and the crowd of Indians that poured from the temple could not at first discover the reason for the imperative summons given by their medicine man. But they soon learned the cause, for the prostrate one, recovering from Nestor's blow, excitedly told what had

happened, that their prisoners were escaping. There was a rush of feet and voices called one to the other. Then came a gleam as of torches being torn from their places in the temple.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Ned, grimly.

"Do the best you can," advised Jerry.

The three women of the party were placed in the middle, with the men grouped around them. Jerry and Ned were in the lead, while Nestor, with Professor Snodgrass, and one of the younger men of the prisoners, brought up the rear.

Suddenly there was a hissing sound in the air, and something seemed to fly over the heads of the escaping ones.

"Arrows!" exclaimed Mr. Deering. "They are shooting arrows at us. Few of the Indians have guns, but those few may use them."

His fear proved correct a little later, when the darkness of the night was cut by slivers of flame, and bullets sang over the heads of our friends, and those they were trying to save.

"If they don't shoot any better than that we have little to fear," said Jerry.

"Wow!" exclaimed Ned, ducking as something sang over his head. "That was closer. I'm going to fire, Jerry!"

As he spoke he leveled his revolver at the black

mass of pursuing Indians, and fired. Jerry did the same. It was the only thing to do to save their lives and protect the prisoners. Jim Nestor now opened fire, and the professor, anxious to protect the flying lizard he had so unexpectedly secured, plucked up courage to use the extra revolver, which the miner had thrust into his hand. Jerry, Ned and Nestor each had two, fully loaded.

The fight was now on in earnest, the Indians battling desperately, for they wanted to keep their prisoners, punish those who had dared interrupt the sacred rites, and they wanted to secure the flying lizard. With howls and yells they came on, now sending a flight of arrows and again using their guns. Fortunately none of our friends were hurt, but occasional cries of pain from the Indians told that some had been struck. The battle went on in the rain and darkness, the four rescuers seeking to get the prisoners to the airship. On they rushed, firing and being fired upon. The ceremonial lights were less frequent now, and the fugitives were better protected by darkness.

"Aren't we near the airship?" panted the professor, as he fired the last shot in his revolver. None of the bullets could have found a mark, as he aimed the weapon high in the air.

"We're almost there," answered Jerry. "Are they coming any nearer, Jim?"

"They're pressing us close," replied the miner.

Suddenly, as the little band, running for their lives, turned a huge rock in the path toward the upper end of the valley where the airship was, they saw coming toward them several persons. In the darkness Jerry took them for a party of Indians that had gotten ahead of them to cut off their escape. He was about to fire, when a voice called out:

"Are you there?"

"Yes! Yes, Chunky!" cried the tall lad. "But why did you leave the ship?"

"To come to your rescue," answered Bob. "We heard the firing, and couldn't stand it any longer!"

CHAPTER XXX

NODDY NIXON DEFEATED—CONCLUSION

JERRY felt a sensation of relief. Help had appeared at a most-needed time. An instant after he had spoken Bob raised his rifle and began to pump bullets into the mass of Indians. His example was followed by Sledge Hammer Tod and Mr. Bell.

Such an unexpected fire threw the savages into a panic. They fell back, their leaders crying in vain to make the warriors keep to the attack.

"Now's our chance!" cried Jerry, looking back, and seeing the confusion in the ranks of their enemies. "The airship is just ahead!"

With a final rush they gained it. The old men and women were helped into the cabin.

"Cast off!" cried Jerry to Ned and Bob, who were on the alert for orders. The tall lad rushed to the pilot house and started the gas machine. The *Comet* was tugging and straining at the holding ropes.

"We'll stand off the savages, Tod and I!" yelled Nestor. "You move the ship, Jerry!"

There was need of defense, for the savages had again rushed forward, and now surrounded the airship. They could be plainly seen, as the scores of electric lamps in the craft had been turned on. The two miners began a fusillade against their enemies, Mr. Bell and the professor joining in.

The gas was rushing into the big bag, and, in a few minutes it was sufficiently filled. Jerry started the big propellers, and with a rush the airship left the valleys, soaring upward toward the clouds.

"We're safe!" cried Jerry a little later, when he noted that the airship was a thousand feet high. "Now which way shall we go?"

"Anywhere, so long as it is away from this valley," replied Mr. Deering.

Jerry headed the craft back over the route they had come, and then, setting the automatic steering apparatus, he and the others gave their attention to the captives. Fortunately none of them was hurt, though all were well-nigh exhausted by the race for life. Hot coffee which Bob, true to his promise, had ready, revived them. Then the comparatively slight injuries the rescuers had received were attended to, and they ex-

changed experiences. Bob, and the others in the airship, had been waiting and listening, and, hearing firing, had rushed out in the nick of time.

The rescuers divested themselves of their disguises, which were saved as souvenirs of the trip.

When matters had somewhat quieted down, Mr. Deering and several of the men prisoners came forward with sacks that seemed quite heavy. They laid them on the cabin table.

"What are these?" asked Jerry.

"The gold nuggets," was the answer. "We held on to them during our flight. Now they are yours."

But Jerry and his chums and friends would not take the gold. They insisted that the men and women who had been saved would need the money to provide the necessaries of life, now that they were to go back to civilization.

This brought up the subject of what was to be their future, and, though Mr. Bell offered to provide for the refugees, they decided they would all rather go to some small town, and there begin life over again.

"Then Rockyford is just the place for you," suggested Jim Nestor. "You can live there, as well as anywhere else, it's not far from here, and

close to the diggings, so I can sort of keep an eye on you, in case these Indians try to recapture you," and he chuckled at the idea of the severely punished redmen daring to venture out of their valley. "Tod and I will soon be back at the mine," went on Nestor.

"That is, if Noddy Nixon hasn't gotten possession," remarked Jerry. "I've been apprehensive ever since we came away."

"Oh, we'll get the best of him yet," ventured Bob.

After Mr. Deering and his companions had talked the matter over among themselves, they decided to adopt the advice of Jim Nestor, and make their homes in Rockyford. Professor Snodgrass wanted his cousin to come East with him, and aid science in searching for rare bugs.

"No, thank you," said Mr. Deering. "I've seen all I want to of bugs and flying lizards, since I've been among the Indians. I wouldn't even catch a fly now, science or no science."

The professor sighed, but made no further suggestions. The refugees and their rescuers traveled all that night in the airship, and, though the boys managed to get some sleep, when they were not on watch, the recent captives found so many novelties to take their attention, and were

so fraught with wonder at the idea of sailing through the air, that they did not slumber much.

Three days later, flying under fair skies, and before favorable winds, the travelers of the air sighted the mountains that marked the location of Rockyford, and the boys' gold mine.

"We'll be there in about an hour," announced Jerry, but he did not reckon on an accident that happened about ten minutes later. One of the auxiliary planes of the motor ship broke, and it was decided to descend to repair it. The work did not take long, however, and, while it was going on, Mr. Deering and his friends left the ship, and strolled across the grassy plain, for they were tired of their rather cramped quarters. Professor Snodgrass, naturally, could not miss a chance like that, to hunt for specimens, and he was soon making a careful examination of the ground, and every tree and shrub that he approached. He caught several bugs and insects, all of which were very valuable, he said, but the boys were too anxious to get on to their mine, and see what was the outcome of the claim Noddy had made, to pay much attention to the scientist.

At last the repairs were completed, the party re-entered the ship, Professor Snodgrass, as usual, being last, and then the journey was resumed.

"Hurrah! There's Mike Malone on guard!" cried Ned, when, after coming within sight of the mine, he had peered through a telescope.

"Is he?" cried Bob. "Then, if he's in possession, the lawsuit isn't settled yet. There is some doubt about it, and we have a chance to hold our mine."

"Unless Mr. Malone is there in the interests of Noddy and his gang," put in Jerry.

"Not much!" exclaimed Jim Nestor. "You couldn't hire Mike to work for that bully. You'll find that the case isn't settled yet."

By this time they were within sight of the deputy sheriff, who had sprung to his feet, when he first had a glimpse of the airship, and was now wildly swinging his hat.

A safe landing was made, and, even before they had seen to the disembarkation of their refugee passengers, Jerry, Ned and Bob made a rush for the deputy, who was broadly smiling.

"Well, how about it?" panted Jerry.

"How about what?" inquired Malone, with provoking slowness.

"The mine—our mine—is it still ours?" spluttered Bob.

"It sure is," was the hearty response of the deputy sheriff. "Noddy Nixon and his gang have

been cleaned out, bag and baggage, by the Supreme Court. Their case came up day before yesterday, and their lawyer made a big talk. They went on the stand—Noddy and some of his cronies did—but shucks! what they said didn't amount to a hill of beans. Then the lawyer you folks had hired made a little talk, and it was all over but the shoutin'. The court said Noddy had no claim and decided in your favor, and instructed me to remain in possession until you came, and then to turn the mine over to you.

"Which," went on Malone, "I do, to wit, in manner following, that is to say, accordin' to the statutes in such cases made an' provided, all in due formality with the laws of the United States in general and Arizona in particular, an' blamed glad I am to get rid of this job, only you needn't tell the judge I said so," and, with an air of relief, the official turned over to Jim Nestor papers confirming the right of the boys and their friends to the gold mine.

"Hurrah! That's the stuff!" cried Bob, throwing his hat up in the air, and trying to catch it, but failing, and stumbling down in a heap over a pile of slag.

"Did Noddy make any fuss?" asked Jerry.

"He tried to," was the grim answer of the

deputy. "He come out here, and tried to sass me, but I ordered him off."

"Did he go?" Ned wanted to know.

"Well, I guess he did," was the quick reply. "He and those fellows with him. Noddy allowed as how he was going to get even with you chaps, though, sometime or other."

"Let him try," remarked Jerry.

Noddy did try, and with what results, and what befell the Motor Boys in another trip they made in their airship, will be told of in the next volume of this series, to be called "The Motor Boys Over the Ocean; Or, A Marvelous Rescue in Mid-Air."

After a short rest at the mine, and when the last of the legal formalities regarding the mine had been complied with, the *Comet* was again put in motion, sent up into the air, and the trip to Rockyford made.

There the refugees were made comfortable in a hotel, until they could obtain permanent homes. This they soon did, as the nuggets they had managed to bring away with them proved to be very valuable.

As for our heroes, they found that the new gold vein that was discovered in their mine, was richer even than Jim Nestor and his miners had

dared to hope. For a time there was some apprehension lest Noddy Nixon and his cronies return to do some mischief, but they seemed to have left that part of the country. Professor Snodgrass captured many more specimens, but none that gave him as much pleasure as did the flying lizard, which he mounted in a life-like attitude.

Nothing more was ever heard of the Indians of Lost Valley, for no one cared to make a trip to that perilous place, and it was thought that the savages were severely punished in the battle against the whites. Mr. Bell soon located his son, and had a thrilling story to tell him of the search and rescue.

The Motor Boys returned East, after a month spent in the vicinity of their mine, during which time they made frequent trips in the *Comet.* They were well satisfied with their trip across the Rockies, but were fully determined to seek other adventures in the near future, and it may be said that they had little difficulty in finding them.

THE END

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